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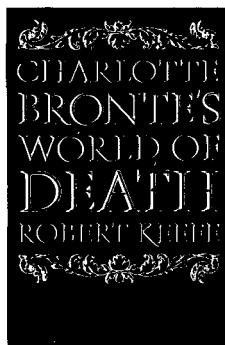
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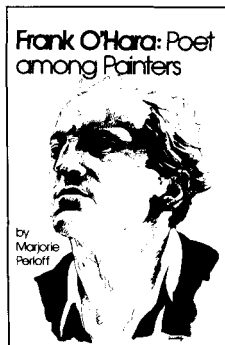
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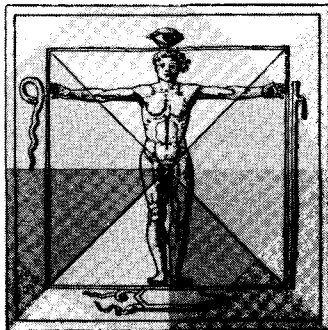
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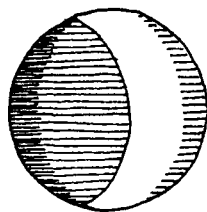
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Isaiah Berlin

**NATIONALISM: PAST NEGLECT AND
PRESENT POWER**

The history of ideas is a rich, but by its very nature an imprecise field, treated with natural suspicion by experts in more exact disciplines, but it has its surprises and rewards. Among them is the discovery that some of the most familiar values of our own culture are more recent than might at first be supposed. Integrity and sincerity were not among the attributes which were admired—indeed, they were scarcely mentioned—in the ancient or medieval worlds, which prized objective truth, in matters of theory, and getting things right, in matters both of theory and practice. The view that variety is desirable, whereas uniformity is monotonous, dreary, dull, a fetter upon the freely-ranging human spirit, “Cimmerian, corpse-like,” as Goethe described Holbach’s *Système de la Nature*, stands in sharp contrast with the traditional view that truth is one, error many, a view scarcely challenged before—at the earliest—the end of the seventeenth century. The notion of toleration, not as a utilitarian expedient to avoid destructive strike, but as an intrinsic value; the concepts of liberty and human rights as they are discussed today; the notion of genius as the defiance of rules by the untrammelled will, contemptuous of the restraint of reason at any level—all these are elements in a great mutation in western thought and feeling that took place in the eighteenth century, the consequences of which appear in various counterrevolutions all too obvious in every sphere of life today. This is a vast topic which I shall not directly discuss: I wish to draw attention to, at most, only one corner of it.

The nineteenth century, as we all know, witnessed an immense growth of historical studies. There are many explanations of this: the

This essay was given as a Lionel Trilling Lecture at Columbia University. An earlier version of some of theses in this essay, although in a different form, was included in an article entitled “The Bent Twig: A Note on Nationalism” in *Foreign Affairs* 51 (1972), 11-30.

revolutionary transformation of both life and thought brought about by the rapid and triumphant development of the natural sciences, in particular by technological invention and the consequent rise of large-scale industry; the rise of new states and classes and rulers in search of pedigrees; the disintegration of age-old religious and social institutions, at once the cause and the consequence of the Renaissance and of the rise of secularism and the Reformation; all this riveted attention upon the phenomena of historical change and novelty. The fillip given to historical, and, indeed, to all genetic studies, was incalculably great. There was a new sense of continuous advance, or at any rate of movement and change in the life of human society. It is not, therefore, surprising that major thinkers in this period set themselves to discover the laws which governed social change. It seemed reasonable to suppose that the new methods of the natural sciences, which proved capable of explaining the nature and the laws of the external world, could perform this service for the human world also. If such laws could be discovered at all, they must hold for the future as well as for the past. Prediction of the human future must be rescued from mystical prophets and interpreters of the apocalyptic books of the Bible, from the astrologers and dabblers in the occult, and become an organised province of scientific knowledge.

This hope spurred the new philosophies of history, and brought into being an entire new field of social studies. The new prophets tended to claim scientific validity for their statements about both the past and the future. Although much of what some of them wrote was the fruit of luxuriant and unbridled and sometimes egomaniacal imaginations, or at any rate highly speculative, the general record is a good deal more respectable than is commonly supposed. Condorcet may have been too optimistic in prophesying the development of a comprehensive and systematic natural science of man, and with it the end of crime and folly and misery in human affairs, due to indolence and ignorance and irrationality. In the darkness of his prison in 1794 he drew a glowing picture of a new, virtuous and happy world, organised by the application of scientific method to social organisation by intellectually and morally liberated men, leading to a harmonious society of nations, unbroken progress in the arts and sciences and perpetual peace. This was plainly oversanguine, yet the fruitfulness of applying mathematical, and in particular statistical, techniques to social problems was a prophecy at once original and important.

Saint-Simon was a man of genius who, as everyone knows, predicted the inevitable triumph of a technocratic order. He spoke of

the coming union of science, finance and industrial organisation, and the replacement, in this new world of producers aided by scientists, of what amounted to indoctrination by a new race of propagandists—artists, poets, priests of a new secular religion, mobilising men's emotions, without which the new industrial world could not be made to function. His disciple, Auguste Comte, called for and predicted the creation of an authoritarian élite to educate and control a rational, but not a democratic or liberal, society and its scientifically trained citizens. I will not enlarge upon the validity of this prophecy: the combination of technological skills and the absolute authority of a secular priesthood has been realised only too successfully in our day. And if those who believed that prejudice and ignorance and superstition, and their embodiment in irrational and repressive laws, economic, political, racial and sexual, would be swept away by the new enlightenment, have not had their expectations realised, this does not diminish the degree of their insight into the new paths which had opened in western European development. This was the very vision of a rational, swept and garnered, new order, heralded by Bentham and Macaulay, which troubled Mill and Tocqueville and deeply repelled Carlyle and Disraeli, Ruskin and Thoreau, and, before them, some among the early German romantics at the turn of the nineteenth century. Fourier, in his turn, together with much nonsense, thundered against the evils of trade and industry, engaged in unbridled economic competition, tending to wanton destruction or adulteration of the fruits of human labour by those who wished to increase their own profits; he protested that the growth of centralised control over vast human groups led to servitude and alienation, and advocated the end of repression and the need for the rational canalisation of the passions by careful vocational guidance which would enable all human desires, capacities, inclinations, to develop in a free and creative direction. Fourier was given to grotesque fantasies: but these ideas were not absurd, and much of what he predicted is now conventional wisdom.

Everyone has recognised the fatal accuracy of Tocqueville's uneasy anticipation of the conformity and the monotony of democratic egalitarianism, whatever may be thought of the nostrums by which he sought to modify its effects. Nor do I know of anyone who would deny that Karl Marx, whatever his errors, displayed unique powers of prognosis in identifying some of the central factors at work in his day that were not obvious to his contemporaries—the interdependence of technological change and culture, the concentration and centralisation of the means of production in private hands, the inexorable march of

industrialisation, the rise and vast development of Big Business, then in its embryo, and the inevitable sharpening of social and political conflicts that this involved. Nor was he unsuccessful in unmasking the political and moral, the philosophical and religious, liberal and scientific disguises under which some of the most brutal manifestations of these conflicts and their social and intellectual consequences were concealed. These were major prophets, and there were others. The brilliant and wayward Bakunin predicted more accurately than his great rival Marx the situations in which great risings of the dispossessed would take place, and foresaw that they were liable to develop not in the most industrialised societies, on a rising curve of economic progress, but in countries in which the majority of the population was near subsistence level and had least to lose by an upheaval—primitive peasants in conditions of desperate poverty in backward rural economies where capitalism was the weakest, such as Spain and Russia. He would have had no difficulty in understanding the causes of the great social upheavals in Asia and Africa in our own day. I could go on: the poet Heine, addressing the French in the early years of the reign of Louis Philippe, saw that one fine day their German neighbours, spurred by a combination of historical memories and resentments with metaphysical and moral fanaticism, would fall upon them, and uproot the great monuments of western culture: “Like early Christians, whom neither physical torture nor physical pleasure could break, restrained neither by fear nor greed,” these ideologically intoxicated barbarians would turn Europe into a desert. Lassalle preached, and perhaps foresaw, state socialism—the people’s democracies of our day, whether one calls them state communism or state capitalism, a hybrid which Marx utterly condemned in his notes on the Gotha programme.

A decade or so later Jakob Burckhardt anticipated the military-industrial complexes which would inevitably control the decadent countries of the west; Max Weber had no doubts about the growing power of bureaucracy; Durkheim warned of the possibility of *anomie*; there followed all the nightmares of Zamyatin, Aldous Huxley, Orwell, half satirists, half prophets of our own time. Some remained pure prophecies, others, notably those of the Marxists, and of Heine’s new philosophical barbarians who dominated the imagination of racialists and neopagan irrationalists, were, perhaps, to some degree self-fulfilling. The nineteenth century generated a great many other Utopias and prognoses, liberal, socialist, technocratic and those that were filled with neomedieval nostalgia, a craving for a largely imagi-

nary *Gemeinschaft* in the past—systems for the most part today justly forgotten. In all this great array of elaborate, statistically-supported mass of futurology and fantasy, there is one peculiar lacuna. There was one movement which dominated much of the nineteenth century in Europe and was so pervasive, so familiar, that it is only by a conscious effort of the imagination that one can conceive a world in which it played no part: it had its partisans and its enemies, its democratic, aristocratic and monarchist wings, it inspired men of action and artists, intellectual élites and the masses: but, oddly enough, no significant thinkers known to me predicted for it a future in which it would play an even more dominant role. Yet it would, perhaps, be no overstatement to say that it is one of the most powerful, in some regions the most powerful, single movement at work in the world today; and that some of those who failed to foresee this development have paid for it with their liberty, indeed, with their lives. This movement is nationalism. No influential thinker, to the best of my knowledge, foresaw its future—at any rate, no one clearly foretold it. The only exception known to me is the underrated Moses Hess, who, in 1862, in his book *Rome and Jerusalem*, affirmed that the Jews had the historic mission of uniting communism and nationality. But this was exhortation rather than prophecy, and the book remained virtually unread save by Zionists of a later day.

There is no need to emphasise the obvious fact that the great majority of the sovereign states represented at the Assembly of the United Nations today are actuated in a good deal of their behaviour by strong nationalist passions, even more than their predecessors of the League of Nations. Yet I suspect that this fact would have surprised most of the prophets of the nineteenth century, no matter how intelligent and politically intuitive. This is so because most social and political observers of that time, whether or not they were themselves nationalists, tended in general to anticipate the decline of this sentiment. Nationalism was, by and large, regarded in Europe as a passing phase. The desire on the part of most men to be citizens of a state coterminous with the nation which they regarded as their own was considered to be natural or, at any rate, brought about by a historical-political development of which the growth of national consciousness was at once the cause and the effect, at any rate in the west. Nationalism as a sentiment and an ideology was not (in my opinion, rightly) equated with national consciousness.

The need to belong to an easily identifiable group had been regarded, at any rate since Aristotle, as a natural requirement on the

part of human beings: families, clans, tribes, estates, social orders, classes, religious organisations, political parties, and finally nations and states, were historical forms of the fulfillment of this basic human need. No one particular form was, perhaps, as necessary to human existence as the need for food or shelter or security or procreation, but some form of it was indispensable, and various theories were offered to account for the historical progression of these forms, from Plato and Polybius to Machiavelli, Bossuet, Vico, Turgot, Herder, Saint-Simon, Hegel, Comte, Marx and their modern successors. Common ancestry, common language, customs, traditions, memories, continuous occupancy of the same territory for a long period of time, were held to constitute a society. This kind of homogeneity emphasised the differences between one group and its neighbours, the existence of tribal, cultural or national solidarity, and with it, a sense of difference from, often accompanied by active dislike or contempt for, groups with different customs and different putative origins; and so was accepted as both accounting for and justifying national statehood. The British, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Scandinavian peoples had achieved this well before the nineteenth century; the German, Italian, Polish, Balkan and Baltic peoples had not. The Swiss had achieved a unique solution of their own. The coincidence of the territory of the state and nation was regarded as, on the whole, desirable, save by the supporters of the dynastic, multinational empires of Russia, Austria, Turkey, or by imperialists, socialist internationalists, anarchists, and perhaps some ultramontane Catholics. The majority of political thinkers, whether they approved of it or not, accepted this as an inevitable phase of social organisation. Some hoped or feared that it would be succeeded by other forms of political structure; some seemed to regard it as “natural” and permanent. Nationalism—the elevation of the interests of the unity and self-determination of the nation to the status of the supreme value before which all other considerations must, if need be, yield at all times, an ideology to which German and Italian thinkers seemed particularly prone—was looked on by observers of a more liberal type as a passing phase due to the exacerbation of national consciousness held down and forcibly repressed by despotic rulers aided by subservient churches.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the aspirations for political unity and self-rule of the Germans and Italians seemed well on the way to realisation. Soon this dominant trend would liberate the oppressed peoples of the multinational empires too. After this, so it

was believed, nationalism, which was a pathological inflammation of wounded national consciousness would abate: it was caused by oppression and would vanish with it. This seemed to be taking longer than the optimists anticipated, but by 1919 the basic principle of the right to national self-government seemed universally accepted. The Treaty of Versailles, recognising the right to national independence, whatever else it might fail to achieve, would at any rate solve the so-called national question. There was, of course, the question of the rights of various national minorities in the new national states, but these could be guaranteed by the new League of Nations—surely if there was anything these states could be expected to understand, if only from their own historical experience, it was the need to satisfy the craving for autonomy on the part of ethnic or cultural groups within their borders. Other problems might still rack mankind—colonial exploitation, social and political inequality, ignorance, poverty, injustice, hunger, disease, corruption, privilege; but most enlightened liberals, and, indeed, socialists, assumed that nationalism would decline, since the deepest wounds inflicted upon nations were on the way to being healed.

Marxists and other radical socialists went further. For them, national sentiment itself was a form of false consciousness, an ideology generated, consciously or not, by the economic domination of a particular class, the bourgeoisie, in alliance with what was left of the old aristocracy, used as a weapon in the retention and promotion of the class control of society, which, in its turn, rested on the exploitation of the labour power of the proletariat. In the fullness of time, the workers, whom the process of production itself would inevitably organise into a disciplined force of ever-increasing size, political awareness and power, would overthrow their capitalist oppressors, enfeebled as they would be by the cutthroat competition among themselves that would undermine their capacity for organised resistance. The expropriators would be expropriated, the knell of capitalism would sound, and with it of the entire ideology of which national sentiment, with religion and parliamentary democracy, were so many particular aspects. National differences might remain, but they would, like local and ethnic characteristics, be unimportant in comparison with the solidarity of the workers of the world, associated producers freely cooperating in the rational harnessing of the forces of nature in the interests of all mankind.

What these views had in common was the belief that nationalism was the ephemeral product of the frustration of human craving for self-

determination, a stage of human progress due to the working of impersonal forces and the ideologies thereby generated by them. On the nature of these forces, theorists were not agreed, but for the most part they supposed that the phenomenon of nationalism itself would disappear with its causes, which in their turn would be destroyed by the irresistible advance of enlightenment, whether conceived in moral or technological terms—the victory of reason or of material progress or of both—identified with changes in the forces and relations of production, or with the struggle for social equality, economic and political democracy and the just distribution of the fruits of the earth; with the destruction of national barriers by world trade or by the triumphs of science, and of a morality founded on rational principles, and so the full realisation of human potentialities which sooner or later would be universally achieved.

In the face of all this, the claims and ideals of mere national groups would tend to lose importance, and would join other relics of human immaturity in ethnological museums. As for the nationalists among peoples who had achieved independence and self-government, they were written off as irrationalists, cases of regression or arrested developments—and, with Nietzscheans, Sorelians, neoromantics, out of account. It became more difficult to ignore mounting nationalism after national unity had been largely achieved—for instance, German chauvinism after 1871, or French integralism, or Italian *sacro egoismo* or the rise of racial theories and other anticipations of fascism. None of these, however accounted for, were, so far as I know, regarded by the futurologists of the late nineteenth century or the early years of our own as harbingers of a new phase of human history; and this seems equally true of conservatives, liberals and Marxists. The age of *Kriege, Krisen, Katastrophen*, which, for instance, Karl Kautsky predicted, he attributed to causes, and described in terms, in which nationalism, if it appears at all, figures only as a by-product, an element in the “super-structure.” No one, so far as I know, so much as hinted that nationalism might dominate the last third of our own century to such a degree that few movements or revolutions would have any chance of success unless they came arm in arm with it, or at any rate not in opposition to it. This curious failure of vision on the part of otherwise acute social thinkers seems to me a fact in need of explanation, or, to say the least, of wider discussion than it has so far obtained. I am neither a historian nor a social psychologist, and do not volunteer an explanation of it: I should merely like to throw out a suggestion which may cast some light on this odd phenomenon.

Before doing so, however, I should like to say something on the origins of European nationalism as a state of mind. I do not mean by this national sentiment as such—that can probably be traced to tribal feeling in the earliest period of recorded history. I mean its elevation into a conscious doctrine, at once the product, articulation and synthesis of states of consciousness that has been recognised by social observers as a force and a weapon. In this sense, nationalism does not seem to exist in the ancient world, nor in the Christian Middle Ages. The Romans may have despised the Greeks, Cicero and Apion said disparaging things about the Jews, and Juvenal about Orientals in general; but this is mere xenophobia. There is passionate patriotism in Machiavelli or Shakespeare—and a long tradition of it long before them. I do not mean by nationalism a mere pride of ancestry—we are all sons of Cadmus, we all come from Troy, we are descended from men who made a covenant with the Lord, we spring from a race of conquerors, Franks or Vikings, and rule over the progeny of Gallo-Romans or Celtic slaves by right of conquest.

By nationalism, I mean something more definite, ideologically important and dangerous: namely the conviction, in the first place, that men belong to a particular human group, and that the way of life of the group differs from that of others; that the characters of the individuals who compose the group are shaped by, and cannot be understood apart from, those of the group, defined in terms of common territory, customs, laws, memories, beliefs, language, artistic and religious expression, social institutions, ways of life, to which some add heredity, kinship, racial characteristics; and that it is these factors which shape human beings, their purposes and their values.

Secondly, that the pattern of life of a society is similar to that of a biological organism; that what this organism needs for its proper development, which those most sensitive to its nature articulate in words or images or other forms of human expression, constitute its common goals; that these goals are supreme; in cases of conflict with other values, which do not derive from the specific ends of a specific “organism”—intellectual or religious or moral, personal or universal—these supreme values should prevail, since only so will decadence and ruin of the nation be averted. Furthermore, that to call such patterns of life organic is to say that they cannot be artificially formed by individuals or groups, however dominating their positions, unless they are themselves penetrated by these historically developing ways of acting and thinking and feeling, for it is these mental and emotional and physical ways of living, of coping with reality, above all

the ways in which human beings deal with one another, that determine everything else and constitute the national organism—the nation—whether it takes the form of a state or not. Whence it follows that the essential human unit in which man's nature is fully realised is not the individual, or a voluntary association which can be dissolved or altered or abandoned at will, but the nation; that it is to the creation and maintenance of the nation that the lives of subordinate units, the family, the tribe, the clan, the province, must, if they are to be fully themselves, be directed; for their nature and purpose, what is often called their meaning, is derived from its nature and its purposes; and that these are revealed not by rational analysis, but by a special awareness, which need not be fully conscious, of the unique relationship that binds individual human beings into the indissoluble and unanalysable organic whole, which Burke identified with society, Rousseau with the people, Hegel with the state, but which for nationalists is, and can only be, the nation, whether its social structure or form of government.

Thirdly, this outlook entails the notion that one of the most compelling, perhaps the most compelling, reason for holding a particular belief, pursuing a particular policy, serving a particular end, living a particular life, is that these ends, beliefs, policies, lives, are *ours*. This is tantamount to saying that these rules or doctrines or principles should be followed not because they lead to virtue or happiness or justice or liberty, or are ordained by God or Church or prince or parliament or some other universally acknowledged authority, or are good or right in themselves, and therefore valid in their own right, universally, for all men in a given situation; rather they are to be followed because these values are those of *my* group—for the nationalist, of *my* nation; these thoughts, feelings, this course of action, are good or right, and I shall achieve fulfilment or happiness by identifying myself with them, because they are demands of the particular form of social life into which I have been born, to which I am connected by Burke's myriad strands, which reach into the past and future, of my nation, and apart from which I am, to change the metaphor, a leaf, a twig, broken off from the tree, which alone can give it life; so that if I am separated from it by circumstance or my own wilfulness, I shall become aimless, I shall wither away, being left, at best, with nostalgic memories of what it once was to have been truly alive and active and performing that function in the pattern of the national life understanding of which alone gave meaning and value to all I was and did.

Florid and emotive prose of this kind was used by Herder, Burke,

Fichte, Michelet, and after them by sundry awakeners of the national souls of their dormant peoples in the Slav provinces of the Austrian or Turkish empires or the oppressed nationalities (as well as the dominant majority population) ruled by the tsar; and in the end throughout the world. There is a distance between Burke's assertion that the individual may be foolish but the species is wise, and Fichte's declaration, a dozen or so years later, that the individual must vanish, must be absorbed, sublimated, into the species. Nevertheless the general direction is the same. This kind of value-laden language may at times affect to be descriptive, aimed only at illuminating the concept of nationhood or historical development. But its influence on conduct has been—and has by those who use it been intended to be—as great as that of the language of natural law or of human rights or of the class war or of any other idea which has shaped our world.

Finally, by a development which need cause no surprise, full-blown nationalism has arrived at the position that, if the satisfaction of the needs of the organism to which I belong turns out to be incompatible with the fulfilment of the goals of other groups, I, or the society to which I indissolubly belong, have no choice but to force them to yield, if need be by force. If my group—let us call it nation—is freely to realise its true nature, this entails the need to remove obstacles in its path. Nothing that obstructs that which I recognise as my—that is, my nation's—supreme goal, can be allowed to have equal value with it. There is no overarching criterion or standard, in terms of which the various values of the lives, attributes, aspirations, of different national groups can be ordered, for such a standard would be supernational, not itself immanent in, part and parcel of, a given social organism, but deriving its validity from some source outside the life of a particular society—a universal standard, as natural law or natural justice are conceived by those who believe in them. But since, on this view, all values and standards must of necessity be those intrinsic to a specific society, and its unique history, to a national organism, in terms of which alone the individual, or the other associations or groups to which he belongs, if he understands himself at all, conceives all values and purposes, such appeals to universality rest on a false view of the nature of man and of history. This is the ideology of organicism, loyalty, the *Volk* as the true carrier of the national values, integralism, historic roots, *la terre et les morts*, the national will; it is directed against the forces of disruption and decay categorised in the pejorative terms used to describe the application of methods of the natural sciences to human affairs—critical, “analytic” reason, “cold” intellect,

destructive, “atomising” individualism, soulless mechanism, alien influences, shallow empiricism, rootless cosmopolitanism, abstract notions of nature, man, rights, which ignore differences of cultures and traditions. This is, in short, the typology and catalogue of the enemy, which begins in the pages of Hamann and Burke, reaches a climax in Fichte and his romantic followers, is systematised by de Maistre and Bonald, and reaches a new height in our own century in the propagandist writings of the First and Second World Wars, and the anathemas of irrationalist and fascist writers, directed at the Enlightenment and all its works.

The language and the thought behind them, charged with emotion as they tend to be, are seldom wholly clear or consistent. The prophets of nationalism sometimes speak as if the superior, indeed, the supreme claims of his nation upon the individual, are based on the fact that its life and ends and history alone give life and meaning to all that he is and does. But this seems to entail that other men stand in a similar relation to their own nations, with claims upon them equally valid and no less absolute, and that these may conflict with full realisation of the ends or “mission” of another, for example, a given individual’s own nation, and this in its turn appears to lead to cultural relativism which ill accords with the absolutism of the premise, even if it does not formally contradict it; as well as opening the door to war of all against all.

There are nationalists who seek to escape this conclusion by efforts to demonstrate that a given nation or race—say, the German—is intrinsically superior to other peoples, that its goals transcend theirs, or that its particular culture breeds beings in whom the true ends of men as such come closer to full realisation than in men outside its culture, as measured by some timeless objective, transnational standard. This is how Fichte speaks in his later writings (and the same thesis is to be found in Arndt and other German nationalists of this period). This, too, is entailed by the idea of the role played by the historic nations alone, each in its appointed time and place, to be found in the thought of Hegel. One can never feel completely certain whether these nationalist writers acclaim their own nation because it is what it is, or because its values alone approximate to some objective ideal or standard which, *ex hypothesi*, only those fortunate enough to be guided by them can even so much as understand, while other societies remain blind to them, and may always remain so, and are therefore objectively inferior. The line between the two conceptions is often blurred; but either leads to a collective self-worship, of which Eu-

ropean, and perhaps American, nationalism has tended to be a powerful expression.

The nation is, of course, not the only focus of such worship. Similar language and rhetoric have historically been used in identifying the true interests of the individual with those of his Church, his culture, his caste, his class, his party; sometimes these have overlapped or been fused into a unified ideal; at other times they have come into conflict. But the most powerful appeal of all these centres of devotion and self-identification has historically been the nation state. The revelation of its hold on its citizens in 1914, when it proved so much stronger than class solidarity of the international working-class movement, exhibited this truth in a peculiarly devastating and tragic fashion.

Nationalism has assumed many forms since its birth in the eighteenth century, especially since its fusion with *étatisme* the doctrine of the supremacy in all spheres of the state, in particular the nation state, and often its alliance with forces making for industrialisation and modernisation. once its sworn enemies. But it seems to me, in all its guises, to retain the four characteristics which I tried to outline above: the belief in the overriding need to belong to a nation; in the organic relationships of all the elements that constitute a nation; in the value of our own simply because it is ours; and, finally, faced by rival contenders for authority or loyalty, in the supremacy of its claims. These ingredients, in varying degrees and proportions, are to be found in all the rapidly growing nationalist ideologies which at present proliferate on the earth.

It may be true that nationalism, as distinct from mere national consciousness—the sense of belonging to a nation—is in the first place a response to a patronising or disparaging attitude towards the traditional values of a society, the result of wounded pride and a sense of humiliation in its most socially conscious members, which in due course produce anger and self-assertion. This appears to be supported by the career of the paradigm of modern nationalism in the German reaction—from the conscious defence of German culture in the relatively mild literary patriotism of Thomasius and Lessing and their seventeenth-century forerunners, to Herder's assertion of cultural autonomy, until it leads to an outburst of aggressive chauvinism in Arndt, Jahn, Körner, Goerres, during and after the Napoleonic invasion. But the story is plainly not so simple. Continuity of language, customs, occupation of a territory, have existed since time immemorial.

External aggression, not merely against tribes or peoples but against large societies unified by religion, or obedience to a single constituted authority, has, after all, occurred often enough in all parts of the globe. Yet neither in Europe nor in Asia, neither in ancient times nor medieval, has this led to a specifically nationalist reaction: such has not been the response to defeat inflicted on Persians by Greeks, or on Greeks by Romans, or on Buddhists by Muslims, or on Graeco-Roman civilisation when it was overrun by Huns or Ottoman Turks, quite apart from all the innumerable smaller wars and destruction of native institutions by conquerors in either continent.

It seems clear, even to me who am not a historian or a sociologist, that while the infliction of a wound on the collective feeling of a society, or at least of its spiritual leaders, may be a necessary condition for the birth of nationalism, it is not a sufficient one: the society must, at least potentially, contain within itself a group or class of persons who are in search of a focus for loyalty or self-identification, or perhaps a base for power, no longer supplied by earlier forces for cohesion—tribal, or religious, or feudal, or dynastic, or military—such as was provided by the centralising policies of the monarchies of France or Spain, and was not provided by the rulers of German lands. In some cases, these conditions are created by the emergence of new social classes seeking control of a society against older rulers, secular or clerical. If to this is added the wound of conquest, or even cultural disparagement from without, of a society which has at any rate the beginnings of a national culture, the soil for the rise of nationalism may be prepared.

Yet one more condition for it seems necessary: for nationalism to develop in it, a society must, in the minds of at least some of its most sensitive members, carry an image of itself as a nation, at least in embryo, in virtue of some general unifying factor or factors—language, ethnic origin, a common history (real or imaginary)—ideas and sentiments which are relatively articulate in the minds of the better educated and more socially and historically minded, and a good deal less articulate, even absent from, the consciousness of the bulk of the population. This national image, which seems to make those in whom it is found liable to resentment if it is ignored or insulted, also turns some among them into a conscious ideological group or movement, particularly if they are faced by some common enemy, whether within the state or outside it—a church or a government or foreign detractors. These are the men who speak or write to the people and seek to make them conscious of their wrongs as a people—poets and novelists,

historians and critics, theologians, philosophers and the like. Thus resistance to French hegemony in all spheres of life began in the apparently remote region of aesthetics and criticism. (I do not here wish to go into the question of what it was in particular that stimulated the original reaction against French neoclassicism in England, or Switzerland.) In the German lands it became a social and political force, a breeding ground of nationalism. Among the Germans it took the form of a deliberate effort by writers to liberate themselves—and others—from what they felt to be asphyxiating conditions—at first from the despotic dogmas of the French aesthetic legislators, which cramped the free development of the spirit.

But besides the arrogant French, there were domestic tyrants, social and not merely aesthetic. The great outburst of individual indignation against the rules and regulations of an oppressive and philistine society, which goes by the name of the “Storm and Stress,” had as its direct objective the knocking down of all the walls and barriers of social life, obsequiousness and servility below and brutality, arbitrariness, arrogance and oppression above, lies and “the gibberish and cant of hypocrisy,” as Burke calls it, at every level. What began to be questioned was the validity of any laws—the rules, supposedly enjoined by God or by nature or by the Prince, that conferred authority and required universal obedience. The demand was for freedom of self-expression, the free expression of the creative will, at its purest and strongest in artists, but present in all men. For Herder, this vital energy was incarnated in the creations of the collective genius of peoples: legends, heroic poetry, myths, laws, customs, song, dance, religious and secular symbolism, temples, cathedrals, ritual acts—all were forms of expression and communication created by no individual authors or identifiable groups, but by the collective and impersonal imagination and will of the entire community, acting at various levels of consciousness; thus, he believed, were generated those intimate and impalpable bonds in virtue of which a society develops as a single organic whole.

The notion of a creative faculty, working in individuals and entire societies alike, replaced the notion of timeless, objective truths, or unalterable models or rules by following which alone men attain to happiness or virtue or justice or any proper fulfilment of their natures. From this sprang a new view of men and society, which stressed vitality, movement, change, respects in which individuals or groups differed rather than resembled each other, the charm and value of diversity, uniqueness, individuality, a view which conceived of the world as a garden where each tree, each flower, grows in its own

peculiar fashion and incorporates those aspirations which circumstances and its own individual nature have generated, and is not, therefore, to be judged by the patterns and goals of other organisms. This cut athwart the dominant *philosophia perennis*, the belief in the generality, uniformity, universality, timeless validity of objective and eternal laws and rules that apply everywhere, at all times, to all men and things, the secular or naturalistic version of which was advocated by the leaders of the French Enlightenment, inspired by the triumph of the natural and mathematical sciences, in terms of which German culture, religious, literary, inward-looking, liable to mysticism, narrowly provincial, at best feebly imitative of the west, made such a poor showing.

I do not wish to imply that this crucial contrast was, at any rate at first, more than a vision in the heads of a small group of German poets and critics. But it was these writers who, in all probability, felt most acutely displaced by the social transformation through which Germany, and in particular Prussia, was passing under the westernising reforms of Frederick the Great. Barred from all real power, unable to fit themselves into the bureaucratic organisation which was imposed on traditional ways of life, acutely sensitive to the incompatibility of their basically Christian, Protestant, moralistic outlook with the scientific temper of the French Enlightenment, harried by the petty despotism of two hundred princes, the most gifted and independent among them responded to the undermining of their world, which had begun with the humiliations inflicted upon their grandfathers by the armies of Louis XIV, by a growing revolt. They contrasted the depth and poetry of the German tradition, with its capacity for fitful but authentic insights into the inexhaustible, inexpressible variety of the life of the spirit, with the shallow materialism, the utilitarianism, and the thin, dehumanised shadow play of the worlds of the French thinkers. This outlook is one of the wellsprings of the romantic movement, which in Germany, at any rate, celebrated the collective will, untrammelled by rules which men could discover by rational methods, the spiritual life of the people in whose activity—or impersonal will—creative individuals could participate, but which they could not observe or describe. The conception of the political life of the nation as the expression of this collective will is the essence of political romanticism—that is, nationalism.

Let me repeat once again that even though nationalism seems to me in the first place to be a response to a wound inflicted upon a society, this, although it is a necessary, is not a sufficient cause of

national self-assertion. The wounds inflicted upon one society by another, since time immemorial, have not in all cases led to a national response. For that, something more is needed—namely, a new vision of life with which the wounded society, or the classes or groups which have been displaced by political and social change, can identify themselves, around which they can gather and attempt to restore their collective life. Thus both the Slavophil and the populist movements in Russia, like German nationalism, can be understood only if one realises the traumatic effect of the violent and rapid modernisation imposed on his people by Peter the Great, and on a smaller scale, by Frederick the Great in Prussia—that is, the reaction against the effect of technological revolutions or the development of new markets and the decay of old ones, the consequent disruption of the lives of entire classes, the lack of opportunity for the use of their skills by educated men psychologically unfit to enter the new bureaucracy, and, finally, in the case of Germany, occupation or colonial rule by a powerful foreign enemy which destroyed traditional ways of life and left men, and especially the most sensitive and self-conscious among them—artists, thinkers, whatever their professions—without an established position, insecure and bewildered. There is then an effort to create a new synthesis, a new ideology, both to explain and justify resistance to the forces working against their convictions and ways of life, and to point in a new direction and offer them a new centre for self-identification.

This is a familiar enough phenomenon in our own time, which has not lacked in social and economic upheavals. Where ethnic ties and common historical experience are not strong enough to have created a sense of nationhood, this new focus can be a social class, or a political party, or a church, or, most often, the centre of power and authority—the state itself, whether or not it is multinational—which raises the banner under which all those whose traditional modes of life have been disrupted—landless peasants, ruined landowners or shopkeepers, unemployed intellectuals, unsuccessful professionals in various spheres—can gather and regroup themselves. But none of these have, in fact, proved as potent, whether as a symbol or as a reality, as capable of acting as a unifying and dynamic force, as the nation; and when the nation is one with other centres of devotion—race, religion, class—its appeal is incomparably strong.

The first true nationalists—the Germans—are an example of the combination of wounded cultural pride and a philosophico-historical vision to stanch the wound and create an inner focus of resistance. First

a small group of educated, discontented Francophobes, then, under the impact of the disasters at the hands of the French armies and Napoleon's *Gleichschaltung*, a vast popular movement, the first great upsurge of nationalist passion, with its wild student chauvinism and book burnings and secret trials of traitors, a sorcerer's apprentice who got out of hand and excited the disgust of calm thinkers like Goethe and Hegel. Other nations followed this path, partly under the influence of German rhetoric, partly because their circumstances were sufficiently similar to create a similar malaise and generate the same dangerous remedy. After Germany, Italy and Poland and Russia, and in due course the Balkan and Baltic nationalities and Ireland, and after the débâcle the French Third Republic, and so to our own day, with its republics and dictatorships in Asia and Africa, the nationalist revolts of regional and ethnic groups in Belgium and Corsica, Canada and Spain and Cyprus, even in France and Britain, and who knows where else.

None of the prophets of the nineteenth century, so far as I can tell, anticipated anything of this kind. If anyone had suggested it, it would surely have been regarded as too improbable to be worth consideration. What is the reason for overlooking the likelihood of this cardinal development of our day?

Among the assumptions of rational thinkers of the liberal type in the nineteenth and for some decades in the twentieth century were these: that liberal democracy was the most satisfactory—or at least, the least unsatisfactory—form of human organisation; that the nation state was, or at least had historically come to be, the normal unit of independent, self-governing human society; and finally, that once the multinational empires (which Herder had denounced as ill-assorted political monstrosities) had been dissolved into their constituent parts, the yearning for union of men with common language, habits, memories, outlooks, would at last be satisfied, and a society of liberated, self-determined nation states—Mazzini's Young Italy, Young Germany, Young Poland, Young Russia—would come into existence, and, inspired by a patriotism not tainted by aggressive nationalism (itself a symptom of a pathological condition induced by oppression), would live at peace and in harmony with each other, no longer impeded by the irrational survivals of a servile past. The fact that a representative of Mazzini's movement was invited to, and attended, the meeting of the First International Workingmen's Association, however little Marx may have liked it, is significant in this respect. This conviction was shared by the liberal and democratic founders of the

succession states after the First World War, and was incorporated in the constitution of the League of Nations. As for Marxists, although they regarded nationalism as historically reactionary, even they did not demand the total abolition of national frontiers; provided that class exploitation was abolished by the socialist revolution, it was assumed that free national societies could exist side by side until, and after, the withering away of the state conceived as an instrument of class domination.

Neither of these ideologies anticipated the growth of national sentiment and, more than that, of aggressive nationalism. What, I think, was ignored was the fact which only, perhaps, Durkheim perceived clearly, namely, that the destruction of traditional hierarchies and orders of social life, in which men's loyalties were deeply involved, by the centralisation and bureaucratic "rationalisation" which industrial progress required and generated, deprived great numbers of men of social and emotional security, produced the notorious phenomena of alienation, spiritual homelessness and growing *anomie*, and needed the creation, by deliberate social policy, of psychological equivalents for the lost cultural, political, religious bonds which served to maintain the older order. The socialists believed that class solidarity, the fraternity of the exploited, and the prospect of a just and rational society which the revolution would bring to birth, would provide this indispensable social cement; and indeed, to a degree it did so. Moreover, some among the poor, the displaced, the deprived, emigrated to the New World. But for the majority the vacuum was filled neither by professional associations, nor political parties, nor the revolutionary myths which Sorel sought to provide, but by the old, traditional bonds, language, the soil, historical memories real and imaginary, and by institutions or leaders which functioned as incarnations of men's conceptions of themselves as a community, a *Gemeinschaft*—symbols and agencies which proved far more powerful than either socialists or enlightened liberals wished to believe. The idea, sometimes invested with a mystical or messianic fervour, of the nation as supreme authority, replacing the church or the prince or the rule of law or other sources of ultimate values, relieved the pain of the wound to group consciousness, whoever may have inflicted it—a foreign enemy or native capitalists or imperialist exploiters or an artificially imposed, heartless bureaucracy.

This sentiment was, no doubt, deliberately exploited by parties and politicians, but it was there to be exploited, it was not invented by those who used it for ulterior purposes of their own. It was there, and

possessed an independent force of its own, which could be combined with other forces, most effectively with the power of a state bent on modernisation, as a defence against other powers conceived of as alien or hostile, or with particular groups and classes and movements within the state, religious, political and economic, with which the bulk of the society did not instinctively identify itself. It developed, and could be used, in many different directions, as a weapon of secularism, industrialisation, modernisation, the rational use of resources, or in an appeal to a real or imaginary past, some lost, pagan or neomedieval paradise, a vision of a braver, simpler, purer life, or as the call of the blood or of some ancient faith, against foreigners or cosmopolitans, or “sophisters, economists and calculators,” who did not understand the true soul of the people or the roots from which it sprang, and robbed it of its heritage.

It seems to me that those who, however perceptive in other respects, ignored the explosive power generated by the combination of unhealed mental wounds, however caused, with the image of the nation as a society of the living, the dead and those yet unborn (sinister as this could prove to be when driven to a point of pathological exacerbation), displayed insufficient grasp of social reality. This seems to me to be as true of the present as of the last two hundred years. Modern nationalism was indeed born on German soil, but it developed wherever conditions sufficiently resembled the impact of modernisation on traditional German society. I do not wish to say that this ideology was inevitable: it might, perhaps, not have been born at all. No one has yet convincingly demonstrated that the human imagination obeys discoverable laws, or is able to predict the movement of ideas. If this cluster of ideas had not been born, history might have taken another turn. The wounds inflicted on the Germans would have been there, but the balm which they generated, what Raymond Aron (who applied it to Marxism) has called the opium of the intellectuals, might have been a different one—and if this had happened, things might have fallen out otherwise. But the idea was born: and the consequences were what they were; and it seems to me to show a certain ideological obstinacy not to recognise their nature and importance.

Why was this, in general, not seen? Partly, perhaps, because of the “Whig interpretation” so widely disseminated by enlightened liberal (and socialist) historians; the picture is familiar: on the one side, the powers of darkness: church, capitalism, tradition, authority, hierarchy, exploitation, privilege; on the other, the *lumières*, the struggle for reason, for knowledge and the destruction of barriers between men, for

equality, human rights (particularly those of the labouring masses), for individual and social liberty, the reduction of misery, oppression, brutality, the emphasis on what men had in common, not on their differences. Yet, to put it at its simplest, the differences were no less real than the generic identity, than Feuerbach's and Marx's "species-being." National sentiment, which sprang from them, fell on both sides of this division between light and darkness, progress and reaction, just as it has within the communist camp of our own day; ignored differences assert themselves, and in the end rise against efforts to ride over them in favour of an assumed, or desired, uniformity. The ideal of a single, scientifically organised world system governed by reason was the heart of the programme of the Enlightenment. When Immanuel Kant, who can scarcely be accused of leanings towards irrationalism, declared that "from the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing can ever be made," what he said was not absurd.

I have one more suggestion to offer. It seems to me that the thought of the nineteenth and early twentieth century was astonishingly Euro-centric. When even the most imaginative and the most radical political thinkers of those times spoke of the inhabitants of Africa or Asia, there was as a rule, something curiously remote and abstract about their ideas. They thought of Asians and Africans almost exclusively in terms of their treatment by Europeans. Whether these thinkers were imperialists, or benevolent paternalists, or liberals and socialists outraged by conquest and exploitation, the peoples of Africa and Asia were discussed either as wards or as victims of Europeans, but seldom, if ever, in their own right, as peoples with histories and cultures of their own; with a past and present and future which must be understood in terms of their own actual character and circumstances; or, if the existence of such indigenous cultures was acknowledged, as in the case of, let us say, India or Persia, China or Japan, it tended to be largely ignored when the needs of these societies in the future were discussed. Consequently, the notion that a mounting nationalism might develop in these continents was not seriously allowed for. Even Lenin seemed to think of national movements in these continents solely as weapons against European imperialism; and of support of them only as being likely to accelerate or retard the march towards revolution in Europe. This is perfectly intelligible, since he and his fellow revolutionaries believed that this was where the centre of world power lay, that the proletarian revolution in Europe would automatically liberate the workers everywhere, that Asian or African colonial or semicolonial regimes would thereby be swept away, and their subjects

integrated into the new, socially emancipated international world order. Consequently, Lenin was not interested in the life of various communities as such, in this respect following Marx, whose pages on, for example, India and China, or for that matter Ireland, expound no specific lessons for their future.

This well-nigh universal Euro-centrism may at least in part account for the fact that the vast explosion not only of anti-imperialism but of nationalism in these continents remained so largely unpredicted. Until the enormous impact of the Japanese victory over Russia in 1904, no non-European people presented itself to the gaze of western social or political theorists as, in the full sense of the word, a nation whose intrinsic character, history, problems, potentialities for the future, constituted a field of study of primary importance for students of public affairs, history, and human development in general. It is this, as much as anything else, that may help to explain this strange lacuna in the futurology of the past. It is instructive to bear in mind that while the Russian Revolution was genuinely free of any nationalist element, even after the Allied Intervention—indeed, it is fair to describe it as wholly antinationalist in character—this did not last. The concessions which Stalin had to make to national sentiment before and during the invasion of Russia by Hitler, and the celebration thereafter of the heroes of purely Russian history, indicate the degree to which the mobilisation of this sentiment was required to promote the ends of the Soviet state. And this holds no less of the vast majority of states that have come into being since the end of the Second World War.

It would not, I think, be an exaggeration to say that no political movement today, at any rate outside the western world, seems likely to succeed unless it allies itself to national sentiment. I must repeat that I am not a historian or a political scientist and so do not claim to offer an explanation of this phenomenon. I only wish to pose a question and indicate the need for greater attention to this particular offshoot of the romantic revolt, which has decisively affected our world.

Irving Howe

GEORGE ELIOT AND THE JEWS

Toward the end of their careers, great writers are sometimes roused to a new energy by thoughts of risk. Some final stab at an area of human experience they had neglected or at a theme only recently become urgent: this excites their imaginations. They leave behind assured achievement, all they have done well and could still do better, and start clambering up the slopes of uncertainty and experiment. Watching them as they slide, slip, and start up again can be very moving—it can also make one very nervous.

Jane Austen, triumphant in *Emma*, edges toward a shy romanticism in *Persuasion*. Dickens, triumphant in *Little Dorrit*, grapples with the psychology of *ressentiment* in the Bradley Headstone segment of *Our Mutual Friend*: quite as if he were “becoming” Dostoevsky. George Eliot, seldom regarded as an innovator in the art of fiction, brushes past the serene equilibrium and symmetrical ironies of *Middlemarch* in order to test new perceptions in her final novel, *Daniel Deronda*. What moves these writers is some inner restlessness to go beyond the known and the finished, to undertake work that will probably turn out to be only partly fulfilled. With George Eliot, it is a movement into ways of writing about the world that partly anticipate the modernism of twentieth-century fiction.

Now this is by no means the usual account of her concluding years and work. By the time she published *Middlemarch* in 1873, she was commonly regarded as the leading English novelist of her day, indeed, as a cultural sage of gravity and truthfulness. When she came to publish *Daniel Deronda* in 1876 there was a noticeable cooling of public response. By now anything from her pen was certain to be treated respectfully, but this was not a book that most English readers could feel easy with. Beneath the critical acclaim could be heard sighs of perplexity: Why was she taxing them with so ponderous, so *unEnglish* a theme as the proto-Zionism to which the hero of the novel commits himself? Why does it contain so many passages of “heavy” reflection? And why could she not restrain that ardent, nervous

idealism of hers, perhaps forgivable in youth but unseemly in a woman of mature years?

In the standard accounts of English literature *Daniel Deronda* was for many years regarded as, at best, a worthy embarrassment, and only with F.R. Leavis's *The Great Tradition* (1947) did there occur a decisive shift in critical opinion. Leavis, while dismissing "the Jewish part" as a flat failure, insisted that in "the Gwendolen Harleth part" Eliot had done her most brilliant work. He toyed with the notion that the two segments of the book might be ripped apart, so that a new novel to be called *Gwendolen Harleth* would emerge, though on a later occasion he admitted that this was an utterly impractical idea since the two strands are, for better or worse, inseparable. With Leavis's overall judgment one isn't disposed to quarrel, only to offer a few complicating amendments. (There are, after all, significant gradations of literary realization in "the Jewish part" of the book; it is not simply to be dismissed.) But even Leavis, probably the best Eliot critic of our time, didn't trouble to ask what it was that Eliot was trying to do in this book, how it might relate to her lifelong moral and intellectual concerns, and to what extent it signified a change in her attitudes toward English society. Answer these questions, and you are in a position to measure the extraordinary *interest* of this novel, an undertaking more complex and valuable than simply laying out its strengths and weaknesses.

The last part of *Middlemarch* appeared in December 1873; the first part of *Daniel Deronda* in February 1876. Between these two dates, and no doubt somewhat before the earlier one, there was an intense activity in George Eliot's creative life.

So great a book as *Middlemarch* can hardly be reduced to one or two concerns, but for my present purpose let me stress these: It is a novel that portrays the difficulties encountered by serious people, those who would live beyond mere appetite or ego, as they try to survive in the society of nineteenth-century England (perhaps any society). If they are to make their way in the world without surrendering their values, such people need a sizable moral and intellectual armament—they cannot permit themselves relaxation or slackness. Not that the society of *Middlemarch* is merely despicable; not at all. It contains elements of benign feeling and remnants of religious faith, but essentially it is a philistine society, sluggish in its provincialism, hostile to the uses of mind, and streaked with that complacent egoism Eliot regards as the most damaging of human failings—an egoism, it may be suggested

with just a bit of overstatement, that flourishes in the life of the middle class. Characters like the serious young doctor Lydgate and the earnest but drifting young woman Dorothea, who set themselves a little apart from the standards of this world, seeking vocations of purpose and lives graced by consciousness, have to measure very soberly the odds against them. They have to know that their struggle, while not doomed, will be difficult. They have to be alert to those subtle corruptions with which the world would stain them (those "spots of commonness," as Eliot calls Lydgate's partronizing view of women).

To be personally distinguished in the world of Jane Austen is to experience some inconvenience; one has to set oneself at a certain distance, yet by no means wholly apart, from the bulk of ordinary, dull people. Somewhat more than half a century later, in the world of George Eliot, the problem has become far more severe. To engage in a serious vocation, whether as artist or scientist or political thinker, or to live by disinterested moral ends that don't necessarily require a particular vocation, is now to face a harsh struggle with the powers that dominate society. It may still be possible to reach a truce allowing one a margin of survival, but only by commanding large gifts of self-knowledge and strategy. As George Eliot sees it, this is not a political struggle: she does not often think in such categories. The Lydgates and Dorotheas need a patient, clear-headed strength in order to hold their ground, defend their standards, and above all, do the work they really want to. Flaws of character can lead to defeat in the enterprise of defining one's life. When a Lydgate suffers the humiliation of worldly "success," it is mostly because he has not understood what his dedication as a scientist demands from him as citizen and man. It is not possible, suggests George Eliot, simultaneously to defy the standards of the community and drift painlessly in its commonplace ways of life.

At the end of *Middlemarch* the problem remains mostly unresolved: how can intelligent and sensitive people carve out a portion of autonomy in their lives? how maintain themselves in their distinctiveness? And because no certain answer emerges, Eliot's preoccupation with the problem of vocation seems, so to say, a problem remaining beyond the last page of the book. It will become more urgent still—indeed, all but obsessional—in *Daniel Deronda*. One might even say that she is here bringing to bear an essentially religious vision, that hunger for spiritual consecration which is the heritage of the Christianity she abandoned in her earlier years. A contemporary writer spoke of Eliot as "the first great *godless* writer of fiction that has appeared in England," and this is keen provided one adds that precisely her

“godlessness,” forlorn and serious, kept prompting her to search for equivalents to belief that would give moral “weight” to human existence. How can we lead a life of meaning in a universe stripped of the faith that had long provided meaning?—this question grips almost every serious writer of the nineteenth century, and George Eliot most of all.

In the time between *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* George Eliot plunged into the study of Jewish history, custom, lore. More, one suspects, than her usual conscientiousness led her to so thorough an investigation. Some years earlier she had gotten to know a Jewish scholar, Emanuel Deutsch, who became head of a “Back to Palestine” group foreshadowing Zionism. Deutsch, from whom George Eliot took lessons in Hebrew, would serve as a model for Mordecai, the prophetic figure in *Daniel Deronda* who speaks at times in the accents of religious mysticism, at times as a modern rationalist, but always in behalf of a Jewish national revival. In 1873, during a continental journey, George Eliot visited synagogues in Frankfurt and Mainz. (Deronda visits one in Frankfurt too.) All the while she was reading avidly in Jewish history: the works of Graetz, Zunz, Geiger, and Steinschneider among Jewish historians, and such gentile students of Jewish life and language as Milman and Renan. From the historians she learned about a long-standing dispute regarding the condition of Jews in Europe: had they sunk irrevocably into “cultural degeneracy,” becoming, as the twentieth-century historian Toynbee would say, a mere “historical fossil,” or were they at the brink of a national renaissance? These disputes, in simplified but affecting form, are echoed in the discussions at the “Hand and Banner” workingmen’s club which Daniel Deronda visits with Mordecai (in turn a possible model for Hyacinth Robinson’s visit to the “Sun and Moon” cafe in James’s *The Princess Cassamassima*). From this range of sources, then,—from books, conversations, and visits—George Eliot came to know something about Jewish life in Europe and to respond to it with that warmth which is her unmistakable signature.

She knew perfectly well, as she noted in her journal, that the Jewish part of the novel seemed “likely to satisfy nobody,” but she stubbornly insisted on the unity of her book—at least, unity of intention and design. Shortly after its publication she wrote to a friend, objecting to “readers who cut the book into scraps and talk of nothing in it but Gwendolen. I meant everything in the book to be related to everything else there.” With so self-conscious a writer as George Eliot, this last sentence merits serious attention. Whether, nonetheless,

everything in the book is related to everything else, or how well related, is something else again.

Daniel Deronda tried the tolerance of the English public, even its most cultivated segment. The fate of the Jews, scattered and in some cases demoralized, was a subject too distant—perhaps it even seemed a little “unsavory”—for a literary public largely fixed in the self-regarding premises of Victorian England. One might favor religious liberty, even deplore persecution in far-off Eastern places, but that was hardly a reason to have the Jews thrust upon one, page after page. The public had adored *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot’s earlier fictions about English country life: such books were familiar, delightful. The public respected, or was trained to respect, the solidity and poise of *Middlemarch*. But Jews, especially loquacious ones prophecying miracles in Palestine, were just too much.

We come now to a crucial question: Why was George Eliot drawn to the Jews at all? What made her suppose them a usable novelistic subject—or, if not usable, then necessary? Not, apparently, any special feelings of personal attachment: it’s important to remember that she had to “work up” this subject. Something more entangled must have been at stake, and though we cannot know for certain, since we are speculating about the inner life of a great writer, I want to put down a few suppositions:

1) She saw in the usual contempt for the Jews a gross instance of that English xenophobia, that English smugness of feeling which she had come increasingly to deplore. As she wrote to Harriet Beecher Stowe:

Precisely because I felt that the usual attitude of Christians toward Jews is—I hardly know whether to say more impious or more stupid when viewed in the light of their professed principles. I therefore felt urged to treat Jews with such sympathy and understanding as my nature and knowledge could attain to.

Anti-Semitism she proceeded to locate as an example of “a spirit of arrogance and contemptuous dictatorialness . . . which has become a national disgrace.” Estimable these sentiments are, but they can hardly be supposed fully to explain why she gave the Jews so large a role in her book, why, that is, she *turned* to them late in her career. For she must have known or sensed that sympathy from a distance by no means insures success in rendering.

2) She found herself going back, through channels of yearning, to something like her youthful religious enthusiasms. The fervor of the

young Evangelical, Marian Evans (her family name), who almost forty years earlier had thrilled to the word of Christianity, would now reappear, far more complex and problematic, in the speeches of Mordecai and the quest of Deronda. "Toward the Hebrews," she wrote to Harriet Beecher Stowe, "we western people who have been reared in Christianity, have a peculiar debt and, whether we acknowledge it or not, a peculiar thoroughness of fellowship in religious and moral sentiment." The phrase "a peculiar thoroughness of fellowship" seems especially pointed: it refers to the linkage that Daniel Deronda is meant to embody between the two great religions of "East" and "West," Judaism and Christianity, neither given literal credence by Eliot in her mature years but both seen as historical repositories of moral wisdom. None of this, to be sure, is made very explicit in a novel that probably makes too many other things explicit; but it is suggested irresistably by the scheme, the organizing fable, of the book—which in one part is the transfiguration of a fine young Protestant apparently of upper-class English birth into an eager young Jew of dubious yet blessed birth, with the first Deronda in search of some ennobling purpose, whether transcendent or not, and the second presumably having found it.

3) She saw in the barely-dawning movement of the Jews toward national regroupment something that might arouse the imagination of cultivated modern people—was not that movement somewhat like the other resurgences of oppressed Europeans in the nineteenth century, which had brought new vision to the continent? She saw in the Jews a usable symbol for the search, recurrent in her work, for modes of action through which to realize moral ideals. I shall come back to this point.

Now among sophisticated critics—there is of course no other kind—it has become customary to patronize George Eliot a little for this sudden turn of interest toward the Jews. That there are major flaws in her treatment of Jewish experience, almost everyone agrees. But to see that is by no means the same as simply to dismiss "the Jewish part" as lacking in interest. Such a response is insensitive: it blurs a notable moment in the growth of human consciousness.

For we should remember that the most vivid Jewish character in nineteenth-century English fiction is alas, Fagin, the thief and mentor of thieves, drawn in brilliant accord with the dominant myth of the Jewish villain, a corrupting agent of Satan let loose to defile the cleanliness of Christian society. To deny the power or persistence of this myth would be foolish; to deny the fearful strength with which Dickens embodied it, still more foolish. *Daniel Deronda*, as Lionel Trilling has remarked in a youthful essay, "enshrined the Jew" in a

“counter-myth”: he is now benevolent, wise, pure-spirited. But if neither myth nor counter-myth allows a fully-shaded humanity to characterization of Jews, still, the counter-myth is a step toward that desired end. Without the one there cannot be the other. Grappling with the “counter-myth,” and thereby coming to see the Jews—some of them—as a possible counter-force to the English society depicted in the novel, George Eliot undertook a task that can only be called heroic. Anyone with a grain of historical imagination ought to feel admiration, even for those parts of *Daniel Deronda* that obviously fail, the failures of great writers often being more valuable than the successes of lesser ones.

This much said, we can turn to to the novel itself.

On its strong side *Daniel Deronda* is the most penetrating scrutiny in nineteenth-century English fiction, perhaps in all English fiction, of human beings caught up in a web of inhuman relations. Only *Little Dorrit* offers perhaps as mordant and relentless a criticism of English (but of course, more than English) society: its devaluation of love and friendship through the exercise of power, its subordination of human affections to the cash nexus, its bone-chilling social elitism.

One doesn't usually think of George Eliot as a social critic, and her liberalism seems more a quality of tone and temper—the tone of generosity, the temper of humaneness—than of any militant desire for social change. But what she shows here of the relationship between Gwendolen and Henleigh Grandcourt, the suavely perverse aristocrat who becomes her husband, is not just the anatomy of a bad marriage, nor even the terror felt by a young woman trapped by an overmastering husband. It is a *system of dehumanized personal relations*, and thereby more than personal relations; it is the barbarism that civilization lightly coats and readily becomes. Except perhaps for Henry James's study of Isabel Archer's subjugation in *Portrait of a Lady* there is nothing else in our language quite like this.

In its strength, then, *Daniel Deronda* is a novel about the crushing weight of power, the power of those who rule over other human beings and take it to be proper that they should rule. Social rulers, personal rulers: there is of course an important difference, but also a still more important affinity. A long-entrenched aristocracy can exert its power with so complete a sense of assurance that its members are likely to feel its domination to be “natural,” somehow ordained by the order of the universe. Grandcourt is hardly a typical aristocrat, but he drives to an ugly extreme a good many aristocratic values. What makes him so

fearful a figure is his assumption that lording it over other people is his right, simply by virtue of the place he occupies in the structure of English society. No chink of doubt or streak of shame mars this belief. He is all of a piece, monolithic in arrogance, and intelligent in maneuver.

No sooner are Gwendolen and Grandcourt married than he sets out quietly to break her will. He rarely lifts his voice, never his hand. As a civilized man—and surely George Eliot meant him to be so regarded—he wants to rule over his wife not by cracking a whip, which would be both vulgar and bothersome, but by creating an atmosphere of wordless mastery so complete there will be no need for cracking a whip. (Theorists of totalitarianism call this “terror-in-reserve.”) In Grandcourt’s behavior there are elements of sadistic perversity, a personal psychopathology, but there is also a strong component of class feeling which covers the perversity. It is not a casual insight, it is a stroke of genius, that Eliot should say of Grandcourt: “If this white-handed man with the perpendicular profile had been sent to govern a difficult colony, he might have won reputation among his contemporaries. He had certainly ability, would have understood that it was safer to exterminate than to cajole superseded proprietors, and would not have flinched from making things safe in that way.” (The magnitude of Eliot’s work can sometimes lead one to pass by such small but brilliant touches as “this white-handed man,” utterly evocative of Grandcourt’s nature, status, and style.) Nor does he flinch with Gwendolen. Mastery of person over person, sex over sex, class over class (we steadily hear the clink of money) is shown in an accumulating discipline of incidents. And, as I say, this is a mastery of and within civilization, well-mannered and well-spoken, in refined English style: at least externally, Grandcourt is a gentleman. This gentleman who would not hesitate to slaughter the brutes in some “difficult colony” knows exactly how to break his wife at home, with a glance of scorn, a muttered phrase. The connoisseur of domination finds his pleasure in *playing* with power.

Gwendolen is a creature whose entire upbringing, false and corrupt, prepares her for the role of victim. Her suffering is extreme, prolonged, without any certain end, and it is remarkable that George Eliot should make us care so strongly about the fate of a young woman in many ways distasteful, even deplorable. This happens not, as foolish critics say, because George Eliot is “didactic” and rubs in “the lesson,” but because she has grasped her characters to their bone, their blood, because she shapes their confrontations into fierce dramatic scenes.

Gwendolen has entangled herself in a web of bad faith—it is this, of course, which keeps her from rebelling against Grandcourt's tyranny, or it is this partly. Knowing before her marriage that Grandcourt keeps another woman and children to whom she will do harm if she marries him, Gwendolen still cannot back off. She cannot forgo the pride of place this marriage will bring, she cannot face the social humiliation that good faith would entail. All this, the weakness and the shame, makes her suffering more credible, closer to our own knowledge of how suffering is compounded by weakness and shame.

In the brilliant opening scene everything is prepared, foreshadowed: Gwendolen plays feverishly at the gaming table, as later she will enter the greater gamble of marriage, and Deronda watches from a distance, as he must always watch. A spoiled creature, Gwendolen is ill-prepared for any useful work or purpose; she is vain with the untouchable vanity of youthful beauty; she is snobbish in a small provincial way, out of ignorance of the world. Beneath her lively manner there hover a good many fears—she fears being touched, she fears poverty, she fears strong emotions, she fears unspecified terrors. There is an incident in Chapter V, clearly meant to bear symbolic weight, where Gwendolen becomes hysterical before a customarily-hidden picture of a dead person: "She [Gwendolen] looked like a statue into which a soul of Fear had entered." A bit later Eliot remarks on Gwendolen's "susceptibility to terror," though without trying to detail its nature. (Toward the end of the novel, there is a parallel, though of a far more serious character, when Gwendolen cannot shake from her mind's eye the picture of Grandcourt as he is drowning.) The incident suggests Gwendolen's fear of, distance from, her own inner being, all that lies hidden in memory and below routine consciousness, all that cannot readily be controlled by will. She is a person who has been trained to avoid self-scrutiny—innerness is a threat to her scheme of life. Adored by those near her, assuming that comforts are a birthright, she relishes the prospect of future distinction but has no clear picture of what it might be: "she did not wish to lead the same sort of life as ordinary young ladies did; but what she was not clear upon was, how she should set about leading any other. . . ." A seepage of boredom has begun, as it must with anyone lacking strong self or belief, and this too prepares her for becoming Grandcourt's victim, since he at least seems likely to provide some diversions from boredom.

All the while, in this creature formed unsystematically upon a system of false values, there is a quickness of life, attractive, keen, touching. Her wit is lively, her mind agile. Somewhere within her a

“root of conscience” can invite pain, enough to spoil the pleasures she wants. “Pleasures” may not be the exact word here: she is not free enough for pleasures, it is a breed of vanities that drives her. Finally, Gwendolen is innocent. She is innocent of the world, of its hardness, of her own self. As Henry James puts it: “The universe forcing itself with a slow, inexorable pressure into a narrow, complacent, and yet after all extremely sensitive mind, and making it ache with the pain of the process—that is Gwendolen’s story.”

Her innocence comes out as both damaging and touching when she seeks advice from the musician Klesmer. The family investments having gone bad, she fancies becoming a singer or actress who will assume a distinguished position in the arts because she is . . . well, herself. The enlightenment to which Klesmer subjects her is painful, though he tries to be kind. He stresses the hard work such a career demands; he is honest about the likelihood of failure, or a mediocrity not much better, as the outcome even of hard work. “You have not said to yourself, ‘I must know this exactly,’ ‘I must understand this exactly,’ ‘I must do this exactly’ . . . You have not yet conceived what excellence is; you must unlearn your mistaken admirations. . . .”

Klesmer is the first of the positive voices—there are not many—to be heard in the novel: he speaks for the calling of art and, it’s very much worth noting, he speaks as an outsider, a German Jew, who has already been seen in a bristling encounter with the amiable philistinism of the English politician, Mr. Bult. Gwendolen has the brains to recognize that Klesmer is telling her the truth, and the sensitivity to blush at the presumptuousness he has been gentle enough not to name. She concludes that there is no alternative to marrying Grandcourt.

Elegant, gliding with the slow movements of a “lizard,” preceding each sentence with an authoritative pause, this Grandcourt is one of the supreme inventions of English fiction. He is not larger than life, as a Lovelace or Heathcliff is sometimes felt to be; he is scaled to social ordinariness, and the demonic principle to his ordinary flesh. He is not torn, as Gwendolen can be, by divisions of the will, for he is the pure double of her “lower self,” bringing to completion all within her that thrills to the demands of status, rank, money, power. Everything about him is realized with a remarkable vividness, as if derived from an enmity so deep as to dispense with rancor.

George Eliot is not often given credit for employing the novelistic techniques usually associated with later, supposedly more sophisticated writers like James and Conrad, but she does so with complete authority in her treatment of Gwendolen and Grandcourt. The girl she

depicts through a hum of analysis, a kind of psychological paraphrase that dramatizes impulse, whim, feeling, inhibition. It is Eliot who speaks, her voice that we hear, but she is so close, both in sympathy and irony, to Gwendolen that we can easily suppose we are “in” Gwendolen’s consciousness. We come to know Gwendolen as a history of reflection and confusion; we are privy to the evasions of her self, the maneuvers of her will. Grandcourt, however, is done mainly from a distance, through the pressure of his behavior on those near him. Eliot is careful not to pretend to have tapped his inner being, for she knows it is important to preserve a margin of opacity—if you wish, of mystery. The important task of the novelist in creating a figure like Grandcourt is not so much to explain him as to validate him: let the reader then puzzle over what he signifies, whether he is even possible, so long as there can be no doubt that he is *there*. (Deronda, by contrast, is transparent, since in the scheme of the book he serves mostly as a convenience, or inconvenience.) We know that Grandcourt is arrogant, bored, intelligent—extremely intelligent; but we are not likely to make the mistake of thinking we fully understand him.

Spider and fly meet: they must. At a country party, with Chinese lanterns lighting up a conservatory, Grandcourt “languidly” asks Gwendolen, “Do you like this sort of thing?” The next few sentences strike a note to be repeated throughout the book:

If the situation had been described to Gwendolen half an hour before, she would have laughed heartily at it, and could only have imagined herself returning a playful, satirical answer. But for some mysterious reason—it was a mystery of which she had a faint wondering consciousness—she dared not be satirical: she had begun to feel a wand over her that made her afraid of offending Grandcourt.

That “faint wondering consciousness” and the “mystery” behind it will grow into Gwendolen’s terror before her husband, the vibration of what is felt as an inescapable submissiveness. George Eliot explores this “mystery” but is too much the novelist simply to clear it up. Later in their courtship, when it seems as if Gwendolen might refuse his offer, we enter more deeply into Grandcourt’s psychology:

At the moment his strongest wish was to be completely master of this creature—this piquant combination of maidenliness and mischief: that she knew things, which made her start away from him, spurred him to triumph over that repugnance . . .

And a few pages later the full measure of Grandcourt’s sadism is

taken, in its perverse silkiness. Is there another writer in English capable of this passage?

From the very first there had been an exasperating fascination in the tricksiness with which she had—not met his advances, but—wheeled away from them. She had been brought to accept them in spite of everything—brought to kneel down like a horse under training for the arena, though she might have an objection all the while. On the whole, Grandcourt got more pleasure out of this notion than he could have done out of winning a girl of whom he was sure that she had a strong inclination for him personally. And yet this pleasure in mastering reluctance flourished along with the habitual persuasion that no woman whom he favored could be quite indifferent to his personal influence; and it seemed to him not unlikely that by-and-by Gwendolen might be more enamored of him than he of her. In any case, she would have to submit; and he enjoyed thinking of her as his future wife, whose pride and spirit were suited to command everyone but himself. He had no taste for a woman who was all tenderness to him, full of petitioning solicitude and willing obedience. He meant to be master of a woman who would have liked to master him, and who perhaps would have been capable of mastering another man.

To stress the social dimension in Eliot's portrait of Grandcourt isn't of course to imply that he "stands for" the English aristocracy or anything else so absurd. It is to suggest that in Grandcourt, George Eliot brought to a point of completeness all those elements in the psychology of aristocratic rulers (also, in part, nonaristocratic ones) that destroy human affections, spontaneities of feeling, and mutual respect. Henry James says of Grandcourt that he is "the most detestable kind of Englishman—the Englishman who thinks it low to articulate," and this keenly links Grandcourt to ideas of class power: for to think it "low to articulate" is to believe that others must be trained to obey without so much as the need to assert your dominion. Grandcourt is here not just an aberrant psychological "case," nor a male monster conjured up by a feminine imagination hungry for revenge. His historical plausibility once acknowledged, we can then, however, give credit to Eliot's treatment of all that is personal or idiosyncratic in his makeup. "The power of tyranny in him," she writes in a dazzling sentence, "seemed a power of living in the presence of any wish that he should die." No wonder the marriage is described as an "empire of Fear," a phrase that comes shortly before the observation that Grandcourt would make an able governor for a "difficult colony."

If we now turn to one of the greatest chapters in the novel, Chapter

48, we find on its very first page a brilliant juxtaposition, but also a joining, of the social and personal components of Grandcourt's character. Here, in ironic voice and with obvious public references, is the first paragraph:

Grandcourt's importance as a subject of this realm was of the grandly passive kind which consists in the inheritance of land. Political and social movements touched him only through the wire of his rental, and his most careful biographer need not have read up on Schleswig-Holstein, the policy of Bismark, trade unions, household suffrage, or even the last commercial panic. He glanced over the best newspaper columns on these topics, and his views on them can hardly be said to have wanted breadth, since he embraced all Germans, all commercial men, and all voters liable to use the wrong kind of soap, under the general epithet of "brutes"; but he took no action on these much agitated questions beyond looking from under his eyelids at any man who mentioned them, and retaining a silence which served to shake the opinions of timid thinkers.

Now the third paragraph, personal in reference:

No movement of Gwendolen in relation to Deronda escaped him. He would have denied that he was jealous; because jealousy would have implied some doubt of his power to hinder what he had determined against. That his wife should have more inclination to another man's society than to his own would not pain him; what he required was that she should be as fully aware as she would have been of a locked hand-cuff, that her inclination was helpless to decide anything in contradiction to his resolve. . . He had not repented of his marriage; it had really brought more of aim into his life, new objects to exert his will upon; and he had not repented of his choice. His taste was fastidious, and Gwendolen satisfied it; he would not have liked a wife who had not received some elevation of rank from him; nor one who did not command admiration by her mien and her beauty; nor one whose nails were not of the right shape; nor one the lobe of whose ear was at all too large and red; nor one who, even if her nails and ears were right, was at the same time a ninny, unable to make spirited answers.

And here is the brief second paragraph indicating Eliot's intention to link "the subject of the realm" whose importance was "of the grandly passive kind" with the husband who found in marriage "new objects to exert his will upon":

But Grandcourt within his own sphere of interest showed some of the qualities which have entered into triumphal diplomacy of the widest continental sort.

The marriage then is the dramatized realization of modes of life, systems of value, social relationships that George Eliot had come to despise. No explicit political or social intent is at work here: George Eliot was not an ideological novelist. But that she wrote with a strong awareness of what her vision of society implied, there is no reason to doubt.

A glance at some of the subsidiary characters should reinforce this opinion. Lush, Grandcourt's minion, the pleasure-loving dog he takes pleasure in kicking, has not the slightest illusion about Grandcourt's ways; he acquiesces in them to keep his creature comforts, as in other circumstances he might bow to a party committee or a corporate board. Sir Hugo Mallinger, Deronda's foster-father, is a good-natured, slack-minded man whose "worldliness" consists in seeing much of the world's ugliness for what it is, yet not at all discommoding himself in behalf of a remedy. He forms no opposition to Grandcourt's values. And Gascoigne, the Rector who is Gwendolen's uncle, is a man of decency, but so conventional in his judgments, so acquiescent to the powers that be, that he comes in effect to serve as an enabler of the wretched marriage. He thinks of it

as a sort of public affair; perhaps there were ways in which it might even strengthen the Establishment. To the Rector, whose father (nobody would have suspected it, and nobody was told) had risen to be a provincial corn-dealer, aristocratic heirship resembled regal heirship in excepting its possessor from the ordinary standard of moral judgments. Grandcourt, the almost certain baronet, the probable peer, was to be ranged with public personages, and was a match to be accepted on broad general grounds national and ecclesiastical.

Precisely this passage has been cited by F. R. Leavis in order to show that George Eliot regards the Rector as "a fine figure of a man" and, what is more, that "there may be snobbery that isn't merely ignoble" (what kind Leavis neglects to say). Aware, nevertheless, of how biting sharp Eliot's style is here, Leavis adds: "There is irony . . . but this is not satire." Very well, we shall not quarrel about a word. It is irony, but so severe it leaves nothing to the claim that the Rector, in his not "merely ignoble" snobbery, serves as anything but an accessory to a human violation.

No; the English side of *Daniel Deronda* projects a sweeping moral-social criticism. The world of Grandcourt, to which Gwendolen submits herself and to which her friends and relatives urge her to submit herself, is "an empire of Fear," where the spirit is crushed by

the urge to power. The novel seems to me one of the great imaginative criticisms of modern society, its works and its ways.

It should now be clear why George Eliot had to place so intolerable a burden on the shoulders of poor Deronda. A writer for whom the idea of purpose, the claims of moral idealism, the “larger life” form the premise of her work, indeed, of her very being, now finds herself at the climax of her career with a vision of society astonishingly caustic, still more astonishingly deficient in positive figures or voices. As a recent Eliot critic, Alan Mintz, has remarked: “To remain in society of necessity involves becoming a Gwendolen; and to become a Daniel Deronda, society—at least English society—has to be left behind.”

Eliot's unused aspirations, the values now so difficult to locate in any English class or group, she thrusts upon Deronda. The precepts he declaims so sententiously betray depths of uneasiness on the part of his creator. They are unexceptionable: a call for “sympathy” as the balm for our afflictions, a hope of moving past the shallow appetites of ego toward a concern for the suffering of the world, everything, in short, we have come to know as Eliot's “religion of humanity.” But the possibility of embodying very much of this in the world depicted in *Daniel Deronda* is decidedly meager. Through a good part of the novel, Deronda is a young man of affirmed high-mindedness who hasn't the vaguest idea of what to do with it. He is given the further assignment of enabling Gwendolen to grasp the significance of her plight and thereby to see beyond it; this would be hard enough in the best circumstances, the role of mentor seldom allowing for much novelistic spontaneity, but it here becomes impossibly stiff in light of the fact that Deronda does so little except stand about, morally impeccable, and talk.

There are moments when Eliot recognizes, apparently, that in the friendship between Gwendolen and Deronda, mostly snatched bits of conversation, she has set in motion a relationship that leads to or into a liaison. The girl's vibrations are quick enough, but Deronda, perhaps because he must be preserved for the Jewish cause, backs away from the beauty, the pathos of Gwendolen. It is no small feat for a young man to do that, and at times we're reminded uncomfortably of Joseph Andrews retreating from Lady Booby. . . . The truth is, George Eliot simply cannot manage here what she has begun, perhaps because this is an instance in which Victorian conventions do exact a price, perhaps because the conflicting roles assigned to Deronda cannot easily be reconciled—the young man who responds sympathetically to Gwen-

dolen's condition, the poised moral figure waiting for his "election and calling."

Eliot needs to find a locus for those moral standards and aspirations that had always illuminated her novels, sometimes unsettled them. She must now, in her last work, move past her familiar world, toward some wished-for "beyond." The need for a crux of meaning by which to justify and sustain the human struggle—this need she tries to satisfy through turning to the Jewish tradition and the new hunger for a Jewish renaissance. Some residue of her youthful self, we may surmise, must have responded warmly to the thought that in the Jewish tradition might be found the moral grounding of all religious life; some part of her adult mind must have responded as warmly to the secular universalism of the incipient Jewish movement. *Deronda* is to be the carrier of this new light—but not in England, only toward distant Palestine. Abundantly virtuous but only intermittently alive, he must bear the weight of the ideals which George Eliot finds increasingly difficult to authenticate in her own world. No wonder he comes to seem a mere figment of will or idea, a speechmaker without blood, a mere accessory to the prophetic Mordecai, the dying spokesman of Jewish rebirth. At some level George Eliot seems to have understood that as a novelist she had made for herself enormous difficulties of specification, concreteness, dramatization. She tried to ease them a little by insuring that at least a few of the Jewish characters, like the shopkeeper Cohen and his family, be stereotypically commonplace. She wanted, clearly, to avoid the vaporousness of excessive idealization—she wanted this as a novelist, but the pressures of the moral sage, the spokesman for "the religion of humanity," overcame her. To be sure, there are bits and pieces in the Jewish part of the book that have their anecdotal or representative interest, where the novelist triumphs over recalcitrant materials. And there have in recent years been some shrewd efforts at justifying, or at least placing, the Jewish part of the book, by denying that it should be seen as novelistic at all. It must, so this argument runs, be regarded as an instance of another genre, say, the visionary romance, which makes demands upon narrative, character, and plausibility of action quite different from those of the novel. Perhaps so; but to say this is only to transfer the difficulty to another plane, for the juxtaposition of two genres of prose fiction, novel and visionary romance, is here as disconcerting as the usual judgment about the varying merits of the two sides of the book conceived simply as a novel.

The difficulties George Eliot encountered in her last novel arose

from the greatness of her achievement in *Daniel Deronda* itself—against that darkly luminous picture of systematic debasement, what invoked positives could survive?

Neither Eliot's dilemma nor her strategy for coping with it is unique. One thinks of Mark Twain in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as he turns toward the black slaves for some point of moral authority that will contrast with the violence and falsity pervading life along the Mississippi. It is a strategy that works for Twain, but not for Eliot.

One wonders why. An answer that comes to mind is that Twain knew the blacks intimately, they were a familiar part of his culture, he did not have to go to books in order to learn about them, while George Eliot was turning here to a portion of European experience she did not know intimately, the Jews were far from a familiar part of her culture, and she did have to go to books in order to learn about them. But surely there is more to it. Writing *Huck Finn* only a few years before Eliot's last novel came out, Twain could draw upon the warmly-remembered and perhaps still-vibrant tradition of plebeian fraternity in America. He could not, to be sure, find a satisfactory way of ending his book, but in yielding to the strength of the blacks, the poise of Nigger Jim, he reached a few moments of moral radiance. The plight of George Eliot was more severe.

Barbaralee Diamonstein

**INSIDE NEW YORK'S ART WORLD:
AN INTERVIEW WITH
ROBERT MOTHERWELL**

This is a shortened version of an interview conducted before an audience at the New School for Social Research in New York, and revised.

Diamonstein: You've been very active as first a painter, and then as writer, teacher, lecturer and editor, have functioned as a spokesman for your own generation, and for modern art itself as well. Your art production ranges from tiny assemblages to major murals. How did it all begin? How does a philosophy major born in the state of Washington and reared in California become an artist founder of the New York School?

Motherwell: I always wanted to paint, beginning in kindergarten. I even won an art fellowship when I was nine or ten. But my father was a powerful establishment figure, and my university studies were a stall and a compromise until I could find the world of painters, wherever it lurked.

Diamonstein: Your father was a banker?

Motherwell: Yes. Since I was his only son, he didn't take to my desire very kindly, though he sensed it was real. I had never known an artistic milieu, but knew there must be one. My problem (apart from my personal isolation) was that it had to be a milieu of "modernism." I already knew the work of Cézanne, Matisse and Kandinsky and Klee. I had followed the usual route of prep school and then Stanford University, in short, the world of academe. Upon graduation Dad asked, "Is it to be law school or business administration or what?" My heart froze. I had never thought of the real world after

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graduation, except for the conviction that there was something else somewhere else. I stayed put, by going on to the Graduate School of Philosophy at Harvard. (Philosophy is the academic subject *par excellence*; moreover, university art schools before World War II were citadels of provincial painting.) The stand-off with my father was finally resolved by my rejecting the offer of a high-paying job (during the depths of the Depression), and accepting his alternative proposition, that in return for my getting a Ph.D. as an insurance policy, he would give me \$50 a week indefinitely. On that amount I spent ten years in New York married during the entire 1940s (the \$50, after my father's premature death during the war, being supplied until 1950 by an adventurous dealer, in return for my entire output). In 1950 I had to augment my income and was given the task of wholly revising the graduate school at Hunter College, a period during which I had both a step-daughter and two daughters of my own. My university clothes lasted well those twenty years, and California wine was less than a dollar a bottle. . . .

At Harvard I had specialized in aesthetics, more particularly, in *The Journals of Eugène Delacroix*, under D. W. Prall and Arthur O. Lovejoy. On their suggestion, I had spent fifteen months in France, on research ostensibly, but actually making painting. I had my still-born, first show at Raymond Duncan's left bank gallery in Paris in May, 1939. Mainly, I think, on the grounds that I was a fellow Californian. . . .

In Paris I had met a young composer, Arthur Berger, who was studying with Nadia Boulanger. He suggested that I complete the Ph.D. at Columbia, instead of Harvard, with Meyer Schapiro, a most crucial external suggestion. Not so much because of Schapiro, who treated me as kindly as he could—but because otherwise it never would have occurred to me to settle in New York, let alone at precisely the right moment (with the emigration of modern European artists) for an aspiring young painter. I happened to take a room with French doors on the garden in the old Rhineland Garden apartments on West 11th Street, not far from where Schapiro lives. In my far-western innocence, I had no idea of how busy celebrated New Yorkers are; on occasion in the night I would knock on Schapiro's door to show him a painting I was making. Finally his patience broke, and he suggested introducing me to other artists, I having made it clear that I wanted nothing to do with social protest painting or regional realism or naturalism in any form. Through him I also came to know and like the *Partisan Review* crowd, despite

the obvious contradiction between socialism and individualistic modernism—their impossible reconciliation was perhaps the idealism of the late thirties and forties. Saul Bellow, exactly my age (as was Delmore Schwarz), gives a vivid account of the *Partisan* scene in *Humboldt's Gift* in chapter two.

Diamonstein: Was it Schapiro who introduced you to the circle of Surrealists who had come to this country?

Motherwell: Yes. Though he understood why I did not like most Surrealist painting. He himself had attacked it earlier (which I did not then know), in favor of abstraction; but he knew that the Surrealists were a highly cultivated, highly sophisticated international group interested in ideas, and headed by a major poet, André Breton, and thought this latest embodiment of the Parisian tradition an appropriate milieu for me, a painter, but more than a painter.

Diamonstein: And who were they?

Motherwell: Besides Breton, there were Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp, André Masson, Yves Tanguy, Matta, Kurt Seligmann, all of whom treated me most generously as a comrade, even as they began to suspect, as my painting began to evolve, that my eye was closer to their fellow exiles Fernand Léger and Piet Mondrian. I remember when I painted *The Little Spanish Prison* in 1941, Matta saying to me, "I don't know if Breton will go for a painting of a flag." (What neither of us knew was that we were looking at one of the earliest of what nowadays would be called color-field paintings.) Schapiro had arranged that I study with Seligmann twice a week, taking half my income; but Schapiro must have known that, more importantly, the Surrealists were a closely-knit Parisian clan and that soon enough I would come to know them all. As it turned out, most particularly Matta, Max Ernst and Duchamp, who were encouraging and remarkably generous, much more so than my American comrades in art. The *Partisan* literary group was benign, if somewhat puzzled by the painter as literate.

Diamonstein: How affected was your work by Surrealism? Is there any fundamental lesson that you acquired from it?

Motherwell: Yes, most definitely. I had had a firm intuition as a stranger that the New York painting scene was filled with technical talent, but lacked an original creative principle, so that its work appeared one step removed in origin. For instance, the enormously gifted Arshile Gorky had gone through a Cézannesque period and was, for the 1940s, in a passé Picasso period, whereas much lesser European talents were more in their own "voice," so to speak,

because they were closer to the living roots of international modernism (in fact, it was through the Surrealists and, above all, personal contact with Matta that Gorky shortly after would take off like a rocket, before his early, anguishing suicide). In brief, as I saw it, the American problem was to find a creative principle that was *not a style*, not stylistic, not an imposed esthetic. I found that principle, I believed, in the Surrealists' own self-definition, "psychic automatism," by which they meant, in psychoanalytic jargon, free-association. In the case of painting, psychic automatism usually begins as "doodling" or scribbling, just as small children begin, or as an adult does absent-mindedly while listening to the telephone or to an endless ceremony. *Doodling is not a style but a process*, a process in which *one's own being is revealed*, willingly or not, which is precisely originality, that burden of modernist individualism. The esthetic comes afterward, according to one's sensibility, and one's gift for plastic transformation. For instance, Kafka or Picasso or Stravinsky were states of being that could be organized only by formidable artistry. And the dynamics of reaching the preconscious, though the same for everyone, differ for everyone, to the exact degree that each person differs from another. With such a creative principle, modernist *American artists could cease to be mannerists*. And what was American would take care of itself, as, in fact, it did soon enough. In the huge scale, the enormous energy, and the sheer daring of the lower depths of Abstract Expressionism. The theoretical procedure of the Surrealists—Arp, Miró, Dalí, Masson, Ernst, Giacometti, Matta, and the others—is "psychic automatism." So is it the core of Abstract Expressionism—Rothko, Pollock, Baziotes, de Kooning, David Smith, Clyfford Still, myself and the others—but how different all these artists are from each other; and how different, in ultimate thrust, are each of these two movements!

Diamonstein: Obviously you and the Surrealists both believed in the poetry of the unconscious, but did they not find your work perhaps a bit too abstract for them?

Motherwell: Sure, that was the American difference, but "abstract" is not exactly the right word. From the Surrealists' point of view, the question of "art" was secondary or unimportant. Matta and I fought over that. For the Surrealists, the Surrealist "vision" and ideology took priority over painting; for us, certain Surrealist methods were *means*, for arriving at painting as painting. (Americans value painting more highly than Europeans, because we do not have enough of it; modern Europe is almost suffocated by millennia of it.)

Still, we see now that Abstract Expressionism also went beyond art as art, in a way that no one has yet been able to articulate adequately in words, but certainly, as a vision of its own, profoundly different in weight, drive and frankness from the fantasy, dreaminess, satire, and black humor of the Surrealists. Of the latter, it is certainly Miró, for all of his bright humor, who is closest in his working procedures and painting values to us Americans.

Diamonstein: You and about a dozen other painters formed what you have referred to as a “flying wedge,” which made New York the center of the scene of the western world. Can you tell me about some of those painters and some of those times?

Motherwell: It's difficult to tell briefly. I have a contextual mind, and could only be intelligible if I spoke for an hour about what New York was like in the early forties: a strange mixture of Cole Porter and Stalinism, immigrants and emigrés, establishment and dispossessed, vital and chaotic, innocent and street-wise, in short, a metropolis clouded by the war. . . . Nearly all of my colleagues had spent years on the WPA. I think their take-home pay was twenty-six dollars and twenty-three cents, or so. Through the thirties in New York, Social Realism tended to dominate not only the art scene but the WPA, so that the modernist painters, according to my colleagues, were put in the worst studio corners, were rarely considered for the sugar plums, for doing big paintings, say, for post offices (ironically, since later we became known for doing big paintings). Gorky did do Newark Airport, highly intelligently, as Léger might have. There was a “beaten” quality of life. An independent man has to have a sense of dignity. A man who longs for independence is just a man who has a sense of his own dignity degraded. The New York art scene had done everything it could to beat it out of the young modernists, so that, given the poverty, the local antimodernism, the prestige of Europe . . . A depression scene in both senses of the word . . . Unspeakable . . . My Pacific Coast optimism was both shocked and perhaps useful, if irritating, in its hope for change. . . .

Yet, there was more great modern art on display in New York in 1940 than there was in the rest of the world put together. Any New Yorker could be much better briefed about the modern movements than anybody living in London or Paris or Berlin or Milan or wherever. At the same time, for the galleries, for the collectors and the trustees of various art institutions, if one was an American *and* a modern artist—I exaggerate to make these points—one was *ipso facto* second-rate or third-rate and certainly derivative (as if Dufy or

Kokoschka or Derain or Lipschitz were not), Calder, who had paid his dues to Paris, excepted.

Diamonstein: How and when did the term the New York School or the School of New York originate?

Motherwell: I had to invent it. After my father died, my mother remarried several years later; her husband had a daughter who was married to a very well-known art dealer in California, Frank Perls. He became interested in what I and my friends were doing and decided to put on a show of it in his gallery in Beverly Hills, and asked me, who knew him only slightly, to write a preface for the show he had chosen. I called the essay "The School of New York." It was 1950, I think. He had chosen some artists who were not strictly Abstract Expressionists, so I had to find an umbrella phrase. A place served best.

Diamonstein: In 1948 you began a series that was later known as the *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* series. Why have you painted that now familiar image more than a hundred times? It represents perhaps only five percent of your work, but is thought of as central to it, in the minds of many. Does the familiarity of the image increase its effectiveness? Perhaps you could tell us the genesis of the work.

Motherwell: As a metaphor, some people think that, in that particular image, I hit (in the Jungian sense of the word) an archetypal image. There are quite a few people not liking abstract art who are moved by that particular image. Therefore the image by definition has something that is beyond or outside art; exactly what it is, I don't know. Some people think it's sexual, but I don't think so. Once I deliberately made one more overtly phallic, and it didn't change the felt response at all. Its specific feeling is not mainly dependent on sexuality—that I am sure of. The image is akin in feeling—a visual equivalent—to the feeling in Garcia Lorca's *Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias*, and was meant to be. The force of Lorca's poem and its resonance are far beyond the death of a matador, but perhaps not beyond the death of Spain. I *meant* the word "elegy" in the title. I was twenty-one in 1936, when the Spanish Civil War began. And I love the "Spanish black" that Rafael Alberti writes of, and which some years later I illustrated in a *livre de peintre*, *A la Pintura*, to his poem. The Spanish Civil War was even more to my generation than Viet Nam was to be thirty years later to its generation, and should never be forgot, even though *la guerre est finie*. For years after the series began, I was often mistaken for a Stalinist, though I think the logical political extension (not that one need be logical: I hate

dogma and rigidity) of extreme modernist individualism, as of *native* American radicalism, is a kind of anarchism, a kind of conscience. Witness Thoreau or Whitman or Reinhardt. No bearable politics is not pluralistic. No endurable existence is not in part private. That *Elegy* series was the first time somebody in this country used black massively as a color form rather than as absence of color. When I exhibited the first large one, *Granada*, in 1950, at the Kootz Gallery, which had a show called *Black or White* (for which I also wrote the preface to the catalog), Kootz had ransacked New York for black pictures, a great black Picasso, and de Kooning and Pollock and Gottlieb and Hofmann and Klee and I don't know who. One day seeing Kootz about something—he was my dealer then—suddenly a small fellow came in, threw his arms around me, pointed at my picture and said, “*That is it.*” I looked at him astonished, had never laid eyes on him before, and I asked, “What’s your name?” He said, “Franz Kline.”

There *is* something about the *Elegy* pictures, as there was to be in Kline, that is very different. (Kline at his best is a superb painter, way beyond beautifully using black and white. An explosive energy, cropping and compactness, some kind of directness that is “beyond” painting, or to put it in another way, is something that painting can do, and very rarely does.) My *Elegies*, though equally direct, are silent, monumental, more architectonic, a massing of black against white, those two sublime colors, *when used as color*.

Diamonstein: Do your colors—the black, the white, the ocher—carry symbolic references as well? Is there a vocabulary that goes with all of your colors, such as the blue of the Gauloises collages?

Motherwell: In some ways all an artist’s past years remain intact, but particularly, as everybody knows, childhood impressions (and I would think also with a painter, the years of puberty and adolescent impressions) are crucial. No one except Dore Ashton, in a Mexican exhibition catalog—I had a big retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City several years ago, but unfortunately the catalog only appeared in Spanish—I think she is the only one who has ever remarked how crucial was the fact that I grew up mainly in prewar California. My father had a vineyard in the Napa Valley. I grew up in a landscape not at all dissimilar from Provence, or from the central plateau of Spain, or from parts of Italy and the Mediterranean basin. In such landscapes, the colors are local, intense and clear, edges are sharp, shadows are black. The reverse of northern atmospheric light. A Rembrandt in Rome is inconceivable, just as a

Piero (della Francesca) is inconceivable in Amsterdam. The hills of California are ocher half the year.

My so-called Francophilia or Mediterraneanophilia is not an acquired taste, but the acceptance of a certain kind of visuality that my childhood and adolescence were permeated with. A Cézanne or a Matisse painted in Provence *looked more natural* to me than, say, a picture of a subway in New York. Cézanne and Matisse were my first two loves in modernism, not only because of their color and light, but also because, I daresay, their youths in nineteenth-century France were not dissimilar from mine in pre-World War II California: sunlit landscape, bourgeois placid life, inner torment, anxiety and artistic alienation. Painting was not only something to love. Its radiance was *everything*.

Diamonstein: How was your “*Open*” series inspired?

Motherwell: Well, “inspired” is not exactly the word. I have had a continual problem in painting that has bothered me. All of you are familiar enough with collage technique. You realize that essentially the collagist takes a lot of disparate elements and assembles them. The problem is, given these disparate and conflicting elements, how ultimately to *unify* them. It’s a painful and precarious way of making order. The separate elements tend to carry on guerrilla warfare with each other, a source of tension, true, but also possibly of chaos. Part of the public’s difficulty in apprehending Abstract Expressionism is an inability to discriminate order that is on the edge of chaos, but still ordered, e.g., Pollock. . . .

It used to cross my mind from time to time that it would be much more intelligent to go the other way—to *begin with unity* and then, within unity, create (through dividing) disparate elements. An idea floating around in my mind for maybe a decade. Now, one day I had a vertical canvas about seven by four feet; I had decided not to use its white ground, and had painted it flat yellow ocher. By studio chance, leaning against it was a smaller canvas with its backside showing—the wooden stretchers—and in looking at the wooden chassis of the smaller rectangle against the larger one, the two together struck me as having a beautiful proportion. I’ve always loved Spanish houses with those big, plain, stark facades, with a dark doorway cut out of the expanse, or say, two windows beautifully cut out of a magnificent whitewashed wall. So I picked up a piece of charcoal and just outlined the smaller canvas on the larger one. At the time, I had the notion of either putting imagery outside the smaller space or within it. One day it occurred to me that it really

didn't need imagery, that it was a picture in itself, a lovely painted surface plane, beautifully, if minimally, *divided, which is what drawing is*. The image association was "an opening," and as I made more, the series came to be called the *Open* series, for eighty-two reasons; cf. the Random House unabridged dictionary.

Diamonstein: You've acknowledged that collage represents the more lyrical, the more joyful side of your work. How did you first become interested in collage? When did you first start to make them?

Motherwell: In the most banal, practical way imaginable. My first dealer was Peggy Guggenheim, who really wasn't a dealer. She had a very small museum of modern art—very small, I mean the size of a typical New York gallery—and she liked to put on small shows. She was very much influenced by the Surrealists at the time, not aesthetically, but by their life attitudes.

Now the Surrealist heroes were such people as Seurat and Rimbaud and Jarry and Lautréamont—people who had shown talent very early. Rimbaud was finished before he was twenty; Seurat was dead at thirty-one; Lautréamont in his early twenties; Jarry's *Ubu* was written as a schoolboy. The Surrealists were always ransacking the cultural world for young talent. Peggy fell in with this. She was married to Max Ernst. She had met me and Baziotes and Pollock, and was going to give us youngsters one-man shows.

Diamonstein: Was this in the early forties?

Motherwell: Yes. I think Pollock's show was in 1943. Baziotes' and mine were in 1944. I was in my twenties then, and you can imagine how I felt at being flanked on one side at her gallery by the abstract tradition—Cubist works by Picasso and Braque, six Mondrians and God knows what else—and on the other Surrealist side, by Miró and Masson and Arp and de Chirico and so on, at her *Art of This Century Gallery*, which was U-shaped in floor plan.

I should perhaps add that maybe ten people a day came to the gallery. Nowadays one thinks that her gallery must have been some tremendous happening, like those at the Guggenheim Museum now. . . . In any event, there had never been a show in America of only collages. Peggy decided to have one. She told me one day, "Listen, I like you kids, and I am going to put on a show of Picasso and Braque and Schwitters and Max Ernst and Miró and Arp collages, and if you guys want to try the medium and what comes out is good, I'll show you all, too."

I conveyed this information to Baziotes and Pollock. Baziotes, who was a very private, profoundly, happily—and rightly so—

married man, went back to his digs and did his collages. Baziotes, as I recall, made works that would be called more montage than collage.

Pollock and I both lived on 8th Street. I had only been painting a couple of years, painting in a bedroom, and he had a more professional studio. Both of us were filled with anxiety, and yet with desire, about this project. So he suggested to me to work together, in his studio. We both made our first collages together there. I can still remember watching him with a mounting tension, fearing I don't know what. But collage somehow became my joy, and has been ever since. . . . Also, it has another function: sometimes I get stuck in painting, as everybody does, and often, after shifting to collage for a time, I can resolve the painting problem when I return to it.

Diamonstein: What do you think of as your contribution to that medium?

Motherwell: I think for a long time I was the only or almost the only American artist who was not solely a collage-maker who consistently took it very seriously. Collage had almost disappeared in the forties and early fifties; though in the last twenty years it has become ubiquitous. What shall I say, I helped keep it alive during the forties and fifties, and do some of my best work in it.

Diamonstein: You reviewed Jackson Pollock's first show at Peggy Guggenheim's, in, I believe, *Partisan Review*.

Motherwell: Yes. You have to realize that when I wrote that most people, including highly knowledgeable people, didn't think what he was doing was painting at all. As I remember, I said that I thought he represented one of the few genuine chances of my generation to make a definitive art statement.

Diamonstein: How would you describe abstract art: does it have the same meaning for you now, today, as it did when you were fresh to it?

Motherwell: No. The word "abstract" comes from two Latin words: it literally means "to take from," or "to select from." The only way one could represent completely without selecting would be to make a painted world identical with this world—which I think sometimes certain realist painters really want to do. Let's say your subject is the battle of Gettysburg: if you want to do it realistically, you have to put in every soldier, every cloud, every tree, every bullet, every drop of blood, smell *everything*. Even artists who want to represent *have* to be highly selective in what they do. So, since the essential nature of abstraction is "to select from," obviously the purpose of selection—this I learned from Alfred North Whitehead—is *emphasis*. In this

sense, there is no communication, no work of art that's not essentially "abstract" by definition, abstracted for the purposes of emphasis.

But there is a lot of art now that is abstracted to such a degree that it is difficult to know *what* is being emphasized. Not only that—there is some contemporary abstract work whose apparent basic premise is that all things are equal, so nothing is emphasized. I find it a kind of madness. Yet Mondrian is as passionate as van Gogh. Not theoretically, but concretely and discretely, yes. (Here we have to rely on the eye, whose discriminations are far finer, subtler and more immediate than can be measured or described in words.) Intensity overcame decoration!

Diamonstein: You've said, "I feel pain for young artists today. The territory of modernism has largely been conquered, there is no longer much unmapped territory, the ground has pretty much been covered." And then you said, "As modern painting completes its task, younger artists are reduced, by arriving so late historically, to adding paragraphs or footnotes of great refinement, rather than whole chapters to the body of modernist art." What's a young painter to do? Give up paint and brush?

Motherwell: Let me amplify a little bit what you say, because it sounds arrogant, or as though I am an old man, which I am, unsympathetic to the young, which I am not.

Diamonstein: Maybe I read it improperly.

Motherwell: No, no, I said it, but I have a horror of boring people, and often say too briefly what I mean.

Obviously, the first generation in a virgin territory has the biggest area to conquer, in this case, modernism. The next generation still has lots, and the next generation after that still has lots, but there does come a moment when one reaches the Pacific, so to speak, where all begins to be pretty thoroughly inhabited. Then come refinements, or embellishments of specific things that have been already discovered, but maybe not thoroughly developed. It's in that context that I made the statement. Historical time is real. So, to answer your question, one can't *invent* a whole new continent. I mean it so happens that in 1863, or whatever year you like, say, 1803, there was a whole continent of modernism to discover. In my opinion, that continent, that dictionary, now is largely complete; the younger artists are, the more they have to deal with an established modern language rather than inventing a new one. So there are perhaps two possibilities for young people: one is to add historical

footnotes, or further to refine an aspect of the dictionary; the other possibility is, as in Elizabethan times, or in medieval times with Dante, that somebody of extraordinary energy and breadth of vision takes an existing language and makes a Shakespearean or a Mozartian or Dantesque statement, shooting the whole works. This I think was very much in the back of Picasso's mind, for example. Though I don't think he was wholly successful. Perhaps Joyce was the most successful. . . . No novel after Joyce is worth as much, in these terms. They can be interesting from other points of view. But in the sense that poets too were involved in making the language of modernism, I could say that, next to Shakespeare, perhaps Joyce is the most magisterial writer in the English language. The modernist movement did produce, in Joyce's *oeuvre*, a supreme masterpiece. In my opinion, the closest in painting is the late work of Cézanne; and, as *the medium* of modernism, the collage technique, whether in *Ulysses* or in Picasso and Braque's Cubism or, for that matter, in TV commercials, which are technically better than the programs. . . .

Diamonstein: You've not only been interested in calligraphy for all of your life, but obviously the word as well. The works of many poets have either inspired or influenced some of your work.

Motherwell: Poets, who after all were the word people, were able to formulate what was meant by modernism much better than, up to then in the forties (at least in what was available in English) the painters had been able to. Though perhaps the first manifesto of modernism is by an American, Edgar Allan Poe; and the next manifestoes are by the French poet who fell in love with Poe, namely Baudelaire. Poe had the fantastic luck to have his prose translated by Baudelaire, one of the great poets of the nineteenth century, and his poetry translated by Mallarmé, also one of the great poets of the nineteenth century, so that in French Poe seems and perhaps is—if words per se are crucial, I believe they are—greater than in English. It's difficult to judge, the French are so taken by the exotic. What could be more exotic than an early-nineteenth-century American genius?

Diamonstein: Early on you became an advocate and a theorist, a spokesman, an historian. Do we tend to be a little uneasy with an artist who is articulate? Has that been a help or a hindrance for you?

Motherwell: It was a social responsibility, and a means towards our survival, but for me so much of a hindrance that for a long time I quit writing. . . . Alfred Barr suspected it, and was disappointed when I confirmed his guess. The Anglo-Saxon tradition, and even

the French tradition, is that painters are high craftsmen, that there is something arrogant about a painter being literate; though I have never met a first-rate painter who wasn't highly intelligent and extremely articulate, in his own manner. The Queen's English isn't the only form. It doesn't matter whether he writes a Coleridge essay, or wants to. He *is* able to communicate. Actually, painters are the most gregarious of all artists.

I remember one night years ago being at a poet's house (Stanley Kunitz). There were four Pulitzer Prize poets; I was the only painter, talking to the women present after dinner, while the four poets were in a passionate discussion—vehement—at the other end of the room, and finally I, rudely, male chauvinist pig, got up and said, "This sounds so interesting, I've GOT to listen to it," and went over to the poets. Robert Lowell was one of them. Robert Penn Warren was another. And Meredith and Kunitz. They had all accepted that Robert Lowell was number one.

Diamonstein: But they were all arguing about number two?

Motherwell: Exactly. Now painters have their own rivalries and jealousies, but basically painters are *voyeurs* and café and coffee-house people, with a more live-and-let-live attitude. Or maybe I am naïve. My wife—my European wife Renate—looks at me sometimes and says, "You know why I love you?" I say, "Why?" And she says, "Because you are so innocent." (laughter)

Diamonstein: You are the spirit of several painters who haunt your canvases, and I am thinking of Picasso and Matisse and Rothko and perhaps even Miró. If that is accurate, to the work of what artist do you most respond?

Motherwell: Not Rothko as an influence. Otherwise yes, to an extent, but more than anybody, to Piero della Francesca. Secondly, Goya. And many others. I love painting! But there is something else that one has to explain. For example, I regard the Van Eycks as miraculous painters, I can only stand there in admiration. But it's impossible for a painter of my cast of mind to do anything with the kind of thing they do, or with Vermeer, or with Velasquez. I've always thought (with absolutely no factual foundation, though I have taught a lot and known some of the great artists of the century) that there may be, say, generically six basic families of painting-minds; and that, at any given historical moment, the art culture needs one family more than another, which therefore becomes historically more prominent. In this sense, though there are many artists I adore, I have to say that then I belong—I suppose to the degree that I can

tell—to a family of “black” painters and earth-color painters in masses, which would include Manet and Goya and Matisse. Because Matisse is such a great colorist, don’t forget that his greatest color is black. And other artists have this particular painting-mind. There are certain works of Picasso that belong to that family too; Miró certainly. It’s an earthy, broad-minded, unsentimental painting family which, like all families, contains mediocrities, but more rarely than, say, the much larger family of representational, fool-the-eye painters. Though everybody talks about Ad Reinhardt as a “black” painter, I don’t think he is a black painter at all. He is a painter who uses dark *tones*, which is something very different from thinking of black as a black color—in the sense that one thinks of fire-engine red as red, not as a tone, if I make myself clear. . . .

It also has to do with a sense of the surface of a painting. Very close up, six inches away, a Rembrandt is sensuous in a way in which emphasized representation, by, say, Vermeer, is not.

Diamonstein: You have a very carefully articulated attitude toward color, and I assume a strong aversion to some colors, too.

Motherwell: I can’t bear synthetic colors. You know, I like the earth colors and ultramarine blue, the cadmium reds, yellows, but the artificial aniline dyed colors and now psychedelic colors I find offensive. Peasant colors are faultless, contemporary consumer colors—industrial colors—are awful in themselves. Still, properly organized any single color can sing.

Diamonstein: You regard each single work as an element in a life’s work. There are almost two hundred in the *Open* series, more than one hundred forty—in spite of the fact that you confess to occasionally erring in your numbering—in your *Elegy* series. What happens if there are more in the *Cave* series, and are there?

Motherwell: Oh, I’m sure there will be. The principal dilemma is what Kierkegaard calls the despair of the aesthetic. If there are a thousand beautiful ideas, how do you choose one instead of another? All I hope (if I ever give up smoking) is to live long enough to develop some of these images much further. The reason I’ve made so many works (out of whatever I’ve made) that could be called series—I detest so-called “serial painting”—is simply because I feel that I’ve never fully resolved any of them. They remain an endless challenge. The day I can make an *Elegy* that really satisfies me, perhaps then I’ll stop that search. But—if I may cite a mighty name—Cézanne wasn’t interested in a mountain; it was to get down *Mont Ste. Victoire* exactly as he meant it. He attacked it again and again, till his heart

gave out, and it's in that sense that I've attacked an image again and again, not to turn out yard-goods. The mysteries of black are inexhaustible, as are even more those of the human spirit, of which painting is a visual trace.

Diamonstein: One last question, and that is, how did you manage to select one image for the monumental mural that you were commissioned to do for the new East Wing of the National Gallery in D.C.?

Motherwell: I made many sketches, of many kinds of images, but finally settled on an elegy, but an elegy that is different from any of the others, less tragic in feeling, called *The Reconciliation Elegy*. The painting is to be thirty-one feet wide, so that it is really quite an enormous painting. What I am trying to do is what I think Abstract Expressionism in part was always trying to do, to make a work, huge as it is, as a spontaneous gesture of the spirit, that one did it in a single moment of passion, so to speak. The technical and energy et cetera problems involved in large-scale spontaneity are unbelievable. But if I succeed . . . Or, the other way around, what else should I do but try, given such a monumental location and such a size, try as best I can—and maybe fall flat on my face—to make my own ultimate statement of what my generation, each in his own way, was driving at, as I understand it?

STORY

Cynthia Ozick

LEVITATION

A pair of novelists, husband and wife, gave a party. The husband was also an editor; he made his living at it. But really he was novelist. His manner was powerless; he did not seem like an editor at all. He had a nice plain pale face, likable. His name was Feingold.

For love, and also because he had always known he did not want a Jewish wife, he married a minister's daughter. Lucy too had hoped to marry out of her tradition. (These words were hers. "Out of my tradition," she said. The idea fevered him.) At the age of twelve she felt herself to belong to the people of the Bible. ("A Hebrew," she said. His heart lurched, joy rocked him.) One night from the pulpit her father read a Psalm; all at once she saw how the Psalmist meant *her*; then and there she became an Ancient Hebrew.

She had huge, intent, sliding eyes, disconcertingly luminous, and copper hair, and a grave and timid way of saying honest things.

They were shy people, and rarely gave parties.

Each had published one novel. Hers was about domestic life; he wrote about Jews.

All the roil about the State of the Novel had passed them by. In the evening after the children had been put to bed, while the portable dishwasher rattled out its smell of burning motor oil, they sat down, she at her desk, he at his, and began to write. They wrote not without puzzlements and travail; nevertheless as naturally as birds. They were devoted to accuracy, psychological realism, and earnest truthfulness; also to virtue, and even to wit. Neither one was troubled by what had happened to the novel: all those declarations about the end of Character and Story. They were serene. Sometimes, closing up their notebooks for the

night, it seemed to them that they were literary friends and lovers, like George Eliot and George Henry Lewes.

In bed they would revel in quantity and murmur distrustingly of theory. "Seven pages so far this week." "Nine-and-a-half, but I had to throw out four. A wrong tack." "Because you're doing first person. First person strangles. You can't get out of their skin." And so on. The one principle they agreed on was the importance of never writing about writers. Your protagonist always has to be someone *real*, with real work-in-the-world—a bureaucrat, a banker, an architect (ah, they envied Conrad his shipmasters!)—otherwise you fall into solipsism, narcissism, tedium, lack of appeal-to-the-common-reader; who knew what other perils.

This difficulty—seizing on a concrete subject—was mainly Lucy's. Feingold's novel—the one he was writing now—was about Menachem ben Zerach, survivor of a massacre of Jews in the town of Estella in Spain in 1328. From morning to midnight he hid under a pile of corpses, until a "compassionate knight" (this was the language of the history Feingold relied on) plucked him out and took him home to tend his wounds. Menachem was then twenty; his father and mother and four younger brothers had been cut down in the terror. Six thousand Jews died in a single day in March. Feingold wrote well about how the mild winds carried the salty fragrance of fresh blood, together with the ashes of Jewish houses, into the faces of the marauders. It was nevertheless a triumphant story: at the end Menachem ben Zerach becomes a renowned scholar.

"If you're going to tell about how after he gets to be a scholar he just sits there and *writes*," Lucy protested, "then you're doing the Forbidden Thing." But Feingold said he meant to concentrate on the massacre, and especially on the life of the "compassionate knight." What had brought him to this compassion? What sort of education? What did he read? Feingold would invent a journal for the compassionate knight, and quote from it. Into this journal the compassionate knight would direct all his gifts, passions, and private opinions.

"Solipsism," Lucy said. "Your compassionate knight is only another writer. Narcissism. Tedium."

They talked often about the Forbidden Thing. After a while they began to call it the Forbidden City, because not only were they (but Lucy especially) tempted to write—solipsistically, narcissistically, tediously, and without common appeal—about writers, but, more narrowly yet, about writers in New York.

“The compassionate knight,” Lucy said, “lived on the Upper West Side of Estella. He lived on the Riverside Drive, the West End Avenue, of Estella. He lived in Estella on Central Park West.”

The Feingolds lived on Central Park West.

In her novel—the published one, not the one she was writing now—Lucy had described, in the first person, where they lived:

By now I have seen quite a few of those West Side apartments. They have mysterious layouts. Rooms with doors that go nowhere—turn the knob, open: a wall. Someone is snoring behind it, in another apartment. They have made two and three or even four and five flats out of these palaces. The toilet bowls have antique cracks that shimmer with moisture like old green rivers. Fluted columns and fireplaces. Artur Rubinstein once paid rent here. On a gilt piano he raced a sonata by Beethoven. The sounds went spinning like mercury. Breathings all lettered now. Editors. Critics. Books, old, old books, heavy as centuries. Shelves built into the cold fireplace; Freud on the grate, Marx on the hearth, Melville, Hawthorne, Emerson. Oh God, the weight, the weight.

Lucy felt herself to be a stylist; Feingold did not. He believed in putting one sentence after another. In his publishing house he had no influence. He was nervous about his decisions. He rejected most manuscripts because he was afraid of mistakes; every mistake lost money. It was a small house panting after profits; Feingold told Lucy that the only books his firm respected belonged to the accountants. Now and then he tried to smuggle in a novel after his own taste, and then he would be brutal to the writer. He knocked the paragraphs about until they were as sparse as his own. “God knows what you would do to mine,” Lucy said; “bald man, bald prose.” The horizon of

Feingold's head shone. She never showed him her work. But they understood they were lucky in each other. They pitied every writer who was not married to a writer. Lucy said: "At least we have the same premises."

Volumes of Jewish history ran up and down their walls; they belonged to Feingold. Lucy read only one book—it was *Emma*—over and over again. Feingold did not have a "philosophical" mind. What he liked was event. Lucy liked to speculate and ruminate. She was slightly more intelligent than Feingold. To strangers he seemed very mild. Lucy, when silent, was a tall copper statue.

They were both devoted to omniscience, but they were not acute enough to see what they meant by it. They thought of themselves as children with a puppet theater: they could make anything at all happen, speak all the lines, with gloved hands bring all the characters to shudders or leaps. They fancied themselves in love with what they called "imagination." It was not true. What they were addicted to was counterfeit pity, and this was because they were absorbed by power, and were powerless.

They lived on pity, and therefore on gossip: who had been childless for ten years, who had lost three successive jobs, who was in danger of being fired, which agent's prestige had fallen, who could not get his second novel published, who was *persona non grata* at this or that magazine, who was drinking seriously, who was a likely suicide, who was dreaming of divorce, who was secretly or flamboyantly sleeping with whom, who was being snubbed, who counted or did not count; and toward everyone in the least way victimized they appeared to feel the most immoderate tenderness. They were, besides, extremely "psychological": kind listeners, helpful, lifting hot palms they would gladly put to anyone's anguished temples. They were attracted to bitter lives.

About their own lives they had a joke: they were "secondary-level" people. Feingold had a secondary-level job with a secondary-level house. Lucy's own publisher was secondary-level; even the address was Second Avenue. The reviews of their books had been written by secondary-level reviewers. All their

friends were secondary-level: not the presidents or partners of the respected firms, but copy editors and production assistants; not the glittering eagles of the intellectual organs, but the wearisome hacks of small Jewish journals; not the fiercely cold-hearted literary critics, but those wan and chattering daily reviewers of film. If they knew a playwright, he was off-off-Broadway in ambition and had not yet been produced. If they knew a painter, he lived in a loft and had exhibited only once, against a wire fence in the outdoor show at Washington Square in the spring. And this struck them as mean and unfair; they liked their friends, but other people—why not they?—were drawn into the deeper caverns of New York, among the lions.

New York! They risked their necks if they ventured out to Broadway for a loaf of bread after dark; muggers hid behind the seesaws in the playgrounds, junkies with knives hung upside down in the jungle gym. Every apartment a lit fortress; you admired the lamps and the locks, the triple locks on the caged-in windows, the double locks and the police rods on the doors, the lamps with timers set to make burglars think you were always at home. Footsteps in the corridor, the elevator's midnight grind; caution's muffled gasps. Their parents lived in Cleveland and St. Paul, and hardly ever dared to visit. All of this: grit and unsuitability (they might have owned a snowy lawn somewhere else); and no one said their names, no one had any curiosity about them, no one ever asked whether they were working on anything new. After half a year their books were remaindered for eighty-nine cents each. Anonymous mediocrities. They could not call themselves forgotten because they had never been noticed.

Lucy had a diagnosis: they were, both of them, sunk in a ghetto. Feingold persisted in his morbid investigations into Inquisitional autos-de-fé in this and that Iberian marketplace. She herself had supposed the inner life of a housebound woman—she cited *Emma*—to contain as much comedy as the cosmos. Jews and women! They were both beside the point. It was necessary to put aside pity; to look to the center; to abandon selflessness; to study power.

They drew up a list of luminaries. They invited Irving

Howe, Susan Sontag, Alfred Kazin, and Leslie Fiedler. They invited Norman Podhoretz and Elizabeth Hardwick. They invited Philip Roth and Joyce Carol Oates and Norman Mailer and William Styron and Donald Barthelme and Jerzy Kosinski and Truman Capote. None of these came; all of them had unlisted numbers, or else machines that answered the telephone, or else were in Prague or Paris or out of town. Nevertheless the apartment filled up. It was a Saturday night in a chill November. Taxis whirled on patches of sleet. On the inside of the apartment door a mound of rainboots grew taller and taller. Two closets were packed tight with rain coats and fur coats; a heap of coats smelling of skunk and lamb fell tangled off a bed.

The party washed and turned like a sluggish tub; it lapped at all the walls of all the rooms. Lucy wore a long skirt, violet-colored, Feingold a lemon shirt and no tie. He looked paler than ever. The apartment had a wide center hall, itself the breadth of a room; the dining room opened off it to the left, the living room to the right. The three party-rooms shone like a triptych: it was as if you could fold them up and enclose everyone into darkness. The guests were free-standing figures in the niches of a cathedral; or else dressed-up cardboard dolls, with their drinks, and their costumes all meticulously hung with sashes and draped collars and little capes, the women's hair variously bound, the men's sprouting and spilling: fashion stalked, Feingold moped. He took in how it all flashed, manhattans and martinis, earrings and shoe-tips—he marveled, but knew it was a falsehood, even a figment. The great world was somewhere else. The conversation could fool you: how these people talked! From the conversation itself—grains of it, carried off, swallowed by new eddyings, swirl devouring swirl, every moment a permutation in the tableau of those free-standing figures or dolls, all of them afloat in a tub—from this or that hint or syllable you could imagine the whole universe in the process of ultimate comprehension. Human nature, the stars, history—the voices drummed and strummed. Lucy swam by blank-eyed, pushing a platter of mottled cheeses. Feingold seized her: “It’s a waste!” She gazed back. He said, “No one’s here!” Mournfully she rocked a stump of cheese; then he lost her.

He went into the living room: it was mainly empty, a few lumps on the sofa. The lumps wore business suits. The dining room was better. Something in formation: something around the big table: coffee cups shimmering to the brim, cake cut onto plates (the mock-Victorian rosebud plates from Boots' drug store in London: the year before their first boy was born Lucy and Feingold saw the Brontës' moors; Coleridge's house in Highgate; Lamb House, Rye, where Edith Wharton had tea with Henry James; Bloomsbury; the Cambridge stairs Forster had lived at the top of)—it seemed about to become a regular visit, with points of view, opinions; a discussion. The voices began to stumble; Feingold liked that, it was nearly human. But then, serving round the forks and paper napkins, he noticed the awful vivacity of their falsetto phrases: actors, theater chatter, who was directing whom, what was opening where; he hated actors. Shrill puppets. Brainless. A double row of faces around the table; gurgles of fools.

The center hall—swept clean. No one there but Lucy, lingering.

"Theater in the dining room," he said. "Junk."

"Film. I heard film."

"Film too," he conceded. "Junk. It's mobbed in there."

"Because they've got the cake. They've got all the food. The living room's got nothing."

"My God," he said, like a man choking, "do you realize *no one came?*"

The living room had—had once had—potato chips. The chips were gone, the carrot sticks eaten, of the celery sticks nothing left but threads. One olive in a dish; Feingold chopped it in two with vicious teeth. The business suits had disappeared. "It's awfully early," Lucy said; "a lot of people had to leave." "It's a cocktail party, that's what happens," Feingold said. "It isn't *exactly* a cocktail party," Lucy said. They sat down on the carpet in front of the fireless grate. "Is that a real fireplace?" someone inquired. "We never light it," Lucy said. "Do you light those candlesticks ever?" "They belonged to Jimmy's grandmother," Lucy said, "we never light them."

She crossed no-man's-land to the dining room. They were serious in there now. The subject was Chaplin's gestures.

In the living room Feingold despaired; no one asked him, he began to tell about the compassionate knight. A problem of ego, he said: compassion being super-consciousness of one's own pride. Not that he believed this; he only thought it provocative to say something original, even if a little muddled. But no one responded. Feingold looked up. "Can't you light that fire?" said a man. "All right," Feingold said. He rolled a paper log made of last Sunday's *Times* and laid a match on it. A flame as clear as a streetlight whitened the faces of the sofa-sitters. He recognized a friend of his from the Seminary—he had what Lucy called "theological" friends—and then and there, really very suddenly, Feingold wanted to talk about God. Or, if not God, then certain historical atrocities, abominations: to wit, the crime of the French nobleman Draconet, a proud Crusader, who in the spring of the year 1247 arrested all the Jews of the province of Vienne, castrated the men, and tore off the breasts of the women; some he did not mutilate, and only cut in two. It interested Feingold that Magna Carta and the Jewish badge of shame were issued in the same year, and that less than a century afterward all the Jews were driven out of England, even families who had been settled there seven or eight generations. He had a soft spot for Pope Clement IV, who absolved the Jews from responsibility for the Black Death. "The plague takes the Jews themselves," the Pope said. Feingold knew innumerable stories about forced conversions, he felt at home with these thoughts, comfortable, the chairs seemed dense with family. He wondered whether it would be appropriate—at a cocktail party, after all!—to inquire after the status of the Seminary friend's agnosticism: was it merely that God had stepped out of history, left the room for a moment, so to speak, without a pass, or was there no Creator to begin with, nothing had been created, the world was a chimera, a solipsist's delusion?

Lucy was uneasy with the friend from the Seminary; he was the one who had administered her conversion, and every encounter was like a new stage in a perpetual examination. She was

glad there was no Jewish catechism. Was she a backslider? Anyhow she felt tested. Sometimes she spoke of Jesus to the children. She looked around—her great eyes wheeled—and saw that everyone in the living room was a Jew.

There were Jews in the dining room too, but the unruffled, devil-may-care kind: the humorists, the painters, film reviewers who went off to studio showings of “Screw on Screen” on the eve of the Day of Atonement. Mostly there were Gentiles in the dining room. Nearly the whole cake was gone. She took the last piece, cubed it on a paper plate, and carried it back to the living room. She blamed Feingold, he was having one of his spasms of fanaticism. Everyone normal, everyone with sense—the humanists and humorists, for instance—would want to keep away. What was he now, after all, but one of those boring autodidacts who spew out everything they read? He was doing it for spite, because no one had come. There he was, telling about the blood-libel. Little Hugh of Lincoln. How in London, in 1279, Jews were torn to pieces by horses, on a charge of having crucified a Christian child. How in 1285, in Munich, a mob burned down a synagogue on the same pretext. At Eastertime in Mainz two years earlier. Three centuries of beatified child martyrs, some of them figments, all called “Little Saints.” The Holy Niño of La-Guardia. Feingold was crazed by these tales, he drank them like a vampire. Lucy stuck a square of chocolate cake in his mouth to shut him up. Feingold was waiting for a voice. The friend from the Seminary, pragmatic, licked off his bit of cake hungrily. It was a cake sent from home, packed by his wife in a plastic bag, to make sure there was something to eat. It was a guaranteed no-lard cake. They were all ravenous. The fire crumpled out in big paper cinders.

The friend from the Seminary had brought a friend. Lucy examined him: she knew how to give catechisms of her own, she was not a novelist for nothing. She catechized and catalogued: a refugee. Fingers like long wax candles, snuffed at the nails. Black sockets: was he blind? It was hard to tell where the eyes were under that ledge of skull. Skull for a head, but such a cushioned mouth, such lips, such orderly expressive teeth. Such

a bone in such a dry wrist. A nose like a saint's. The face of Jesus. He whispered. Everyone leaned over to hear. He was Feingold's voice: the voice Feingold was waiting for.

"Come to modern times," the voice urged. "Come to yesterday." Lucy was right: she could tell a refugee in an instant, even before she heard any accent. They all reminded her of her father. She put away this insight (the resemblance of Presbyterian ministers to Hitler refugees) to talk over with Feingold later: it was nicely analytical, it had enough mystery to satisfy. "Yesterday," the refugee said, "the eyes of God were shut." And Lucy saw him shut his hidden eyes in their tunnels. "Shut," he said, "like iron doors"—a voice of such nobility that Lucy thought immediately of that eerie passage in Genesis where the voice of the Lord God walks in the Garden in the cool of the day and calls to Adam, "Where are you?"

They all listened with a terrible intensity. Again Lucy looked around. It pained her how intense Jews could be, though she too was intense. But she was intense because her brain was roiling with ardor, she wooed mind-pictures, she was a novelist. *They* were intense all the time; she supposed the grocers among them were as intense as any novelist; was it because they had been Chosen, was it because they pitied themselves every breathing moment?

Pity and shock stood in all their faces.

The refugee was telling a story. "I witnessed it," he said, "I am the witness." Horror; sadism; corpses. As if—Lucy took the image from the elusive wind that was his voice in its whisper—as if hundreds and hundreds of Crucifixions were all happening at once. She visualized a hillside with multitudes of crosses, and bodies dropping down from big bloody nails. Every Jew was Jesus. That was the only way Lucy could get hold of it: otherwise it was only a movie. She had seen all the movies, the truth was she could feel nothing. That same bulldozer shoveling those same sticks of skeletons, that same little boy in a cap with twisted mouth and his hands in the air—if there had been a camera at the Crucifixion Christianity would collapse, no one would ever feel anything about it. Cruelty came out of the imagination, and had to be witnessed by the imagination.

All the same, she listened. What he told was exactly like the movies. A gray scene, a scrubby hill, a ravine. Germans in helmets, with shining tar-black belts, wearing gloves. A ragged bundle of Jews at the lip of the ravine—an old grandmother, a child or two, a couple in their forties. All the faces stained with grayness, the stubble on the ground stained gray, the clothes on them limp as shrouds but immobile, as if they were already under the dirt, shut off from breezes, as if they were already stone. The refugee's whisper carved them like sculptures—there they stood, a shadowy stone asterisk of Jews, you could see their nostrils, open as skulls, the stony round ears of the children, the grandmother's awful twig of a neck, the father and mother grasping the children but strangers to each other, not a touch between them, the grandmother cast out, claiming no one and not claimed, all prayerless stone gums. There they stood. For a long while the refugee's voice pinched them and held them, so that you had to look. His voice made Lucy look and look. He pierced the figures through with his whisper. Then he let the shots come. The figures never teetered, never shook: the stoniness broke all at once and they fell cleanly, like sacks, into the ravine. Immediately they were in a heap, with random limbs all tangled together. The refugee's voice like a camera brought a German boot to the edge of the ravine. The boot kicked sand. It kicked and kicked, the sand poured over the family of sacks.

Then Lucy saw the fingers of the listeners—all their fingers were stretched out.

The room began to lift. It ascended. It rose like an ark on waters. Lucy said inside her mind, "This chamber of Jews." It seemed to her that the room was levitating on the little grains of the refugee's whisper. She felt herself alone at the bottom, below the floorboards, while the room floated upward, carrying Jews. Why did it not take her too? Only Jesus could take her. They were being kidnapped, these Jews, by a messenger from the land of the dead. The man had a power. Already he was in the shadow of another tale: she promised herself she would not listen, only Jesus could make her listen. The room was ascending. Above her head it grew smaller and smaller, more and more remote, it fled deeper and deeper into upwardness.

She craned after it. Wouldn't it bump into the apartment upstairs? It was like watching the underside of an elevator, all dirty and hairy, with dust-roots wagging. The black floor moved higher and higher. It was getting free of her, into loftiness, lifting Jews.

The glory of their martyrdom.

Under the rising eave Lucy had an illumination: she saw herself with the children in a little city park. A Sunday afternoon early in May. Feingold has stayed home to nap, and Lucy and the children find seats on a bench and wait for the unusual music to begin. The room is still levitating, but inside Lucy's illumination the boys are chasing birds. They run away from Lucy, they return, they leave. They surround a pigeon. They do not touch the pigeon; Lucy has forbidden it. She has read that city pigeons carry meningitis. A little boy in Red Bank, New Jersey, contracted sleeping sickness from touching a pigeon; after six years, he is still asleep. In his sleep he has grown from a child to an adolescent; puberty has come on him in his sleep, his testicles have dropped down, a benign blond beard glints mildly on his cheeks. His parents weep and weep. He is still asleep. No instruments or players are visible. A woman steps out onto a platform. She is an anthropologist from the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. She explains that there will be no "entertainment" in the usual sense; there will be no "entertainers." The players will not be artists; they will be "real peasants." They have been brought over from Messina, from Calabria. They are shepherds, goatherds. They will sing and dance and play just as they do when they come down from the hills to while away the evenings in the taverns. They will play the instruments that scare away the wolves from the flock. They will sing the songs that celebrate the Madonna of Love. A dozen men file onto the platform. They have heavy faces that do not smile. They have heavy dark skins, cratered and leathery. They have ears and noses that look like dried twisted clay. They have gold teeth. They have no teeth. Some are young; most are in their middle years. One is very old; he wears bells on his fingers. One has an instrument like a butter churn: he shoves a stick in and out of a hole in a wooden tub held under his arm, and a rattling screech

spurts out of it. One blows on two slender pipes simultaneously. One has a long strap, which he rubs. One has a frame of bicycle bells; a descendant of the bells the priests used to beat in the temple of Minerva.

The anthropologist is still explaining everything. She explains the “male” instrument: three wooden knockers; the innermost one lunges up and down between the other two. The songs, she explains, are mainly erotic. The dances are suggestive.

The unusual music commences. The park has filled with Italians—greenhorns from Sicily, settled New Yorkers from Naples. An ancient people. They clap. The old man with the bells on his fingers points his dusty shoe-toes and slowly follows a circle of his own. His eyes are in trance, he squats, he ascends. The anthropologist explains that up-and-down dancing can also be found in parts of Africa. The singers wail like Arabs; the anthropologist notes that the Arab conquest covered the southernmost portion of the Italian boot for two hundred years. The whole chorus of peasants sings in a dialect of archaic Greek; the language has survived in the old songs, the anthropologist explains. The crowd is laughing and stamping. They click their fingers and sway. Lucy’s boys are bored. They watch the man with the finger-bells; they watch the wooden male pump up and down. Everyone is clapping, stamping, clicking, swaying, thumping. The wailing goes on and on, faster and faster. The singers are dancers, the dancers are singers, they turn and turn, they are smiling the drugged smiles of dervishes. At home they grow flowers. They follow the sheep into the deep grass. They drink wine in the taverns at night. Calabria and Sicily in New York, sans wives, in sweat-blotched shirts and wrinkled dusty pants, gasping before strangers who have never smelled the sweetness of their village grasses!

Now the anthropologist from the Smithsonian has vanished out of Lucy’s illumination. A pair of dancers seize each other. Leg winds over leg, belly into belly, each man hopping on a single free leg. Intertwined, they squat and rise, squat and rise. Old Hellenic syllables fly from them. They send out high elastic cries. They celebrate the Madonna, giver of fertility and fecundity. Lucy is glorified. She is exalted. She comprehends. Not that

the musicians are peasants, not that their faces and feet and necks and wrists are blown grass and red earth. An enlightenment comes on her: she sees what is eternal: before the Madonna there was Venus; before Venus, Aphrodite; before Aphrodite, Astarte. Her womb is garden, lamb, and babe. She is the river and the waterfall. She causes grave men of business—goatherds are men of business—to cavort and to flash their gold teeth. She induces them to blow, beat, rub, shake and scrape objects so that music will drop out of them.

Inside Lucy's illumination the dancers are seething. They are writhing. For the sake of the goddess, for the sake of the womb of the goddess, they are turning into serpents. When they grow still they are earth. They are from always to always. Nature is their pulse. Lucy sees: she understands: the gods are God. How terrible to have given up Jesus, a man like these, made of earth like these, with a pulse like these, God entering nature to become god! Jesus, no more miraculous than an ordinary goatherd; is a goatherd miracle? Is a leaf? A nut, a pit, a core, a seed, a stone? Everything is miracle! Lucy sees how she has abandoned nature, how she has lost true religion on account of the God of the Jews. The boys are on their bellies on the ground, digging it up with sticks. They dig and dig: little holes with mounds beside them. They fill them with peach pits, cherry pits, cantaloupe rinds. The Sicilians and Neapolitans pick up their baskets and purses and shopping bags and leave. The benches smell of eaten fruit, running juices, insect-mobbed. The stage is clean.

The living room has escaped altogether. It is very high and extremely small, no wider than the moon on Lucy's thumbnail. It is still sailing upward, and the voices of those on board are so faint that Lucy almost loses them. But she knows which word it is they mainly use. How long can they go on about it? How long? A morbid cud-chewing. Death and death and death. The word is less a human word than an animal's cry; a crow's. Caw caw. It belongs to storms, floods, avalanches. Acts of God. "Holocaust," someone caws dimly from above; she knows it must be Feinhold. He always says this word over and over and over. History is bad for him: how little it makes him seem! Lucy decides it is possible to become jaded by atrocity. She is bored by

the shootings and the gas and the camps, she is not ashamed to admit this. They are as tiresome as prayer. Repetition diminishes conviction; she is thinking of her father leading the same hymns week after week. If you said the same prayer over and over again, wouldn't your brain turn out to be no better than a prayer wheel?

In the dining room all the springs were running down. It was stale in there, a failed party. They were drinking beer or Coke or whiskey-and-water and playing with the cake crumbs on the tablecloth. There was still some cheese left on a plate, and half a bowl of salted peanuts. "The impact of Romantic Individualism," one of the humanists objected. "At the Frick?" "I never saw that." "They certainly are deliberate, you have to say that for them." Lucy, leaning abandoned against the door, tried to tune in. The relief of hearing atheists. A jacket designer who worked in Feingold's art department came in carrying a coat. Feingold had invited her because she was newly divorced; she was afraid to live alone. She was afraid of being ambushed in her basement while doing laundry. "Where's Jimmy?" the jacket designer asked. "In the other room." "Say goodbye for me, will you?" "Goodbye," Lucy said. The humanists—Lucy saw how they were all compassionate knights—stood up. A puddle from an overturned saucer was leaking onto the floor. "Oh, I'll get that," Lucy told the knights, "don't think another thought about it."

Overhead Feingold and the refugees are riding the living room. Their words are specks. All the Jews are in the air.

Richard Sennett

WHAT TOCQUEVILLE FEARED

Open discussions of equality are difficult to conduct today because of a political shorthand that equates the criticism of equality with right-wing politics and the aspiration for equality with left-wing concerns. Tocqueville's writings on equality, in the two volumes of the *Democracy in America*, stand outside this framework; Tocqueville wrote as someone who sees demands for equality as irresistible. Unlike his aristocratic friends and family, Tocqueville did not want to hide from this force of history, nor to defy it. His stand was that of a realist who accepts the inevitable, and looks to see how mankind can best manage a social life it cannot avoid.

The curious and little-remarked thing about the critique of equality in the two volumes of the *Democracy in America* is how much Tocqueville's point of view changes from the first book to the second, which appeared five years later.

In the first volume, Tocqueville takes a familiar image from the past, that of mob rule, and attempts to show what a mob is like under egalitarian conditions. Tocqueville tries to strip away the association of mob rule with the vulgar, the peasant or the urban riff-raff; instead he tries to show how rule of a decent-minded majority in an egalitarian society tends to persecute the dissident. Majorities do more than express their will; they attempt to universalize it. No one can believe unless everyone does; a minority is always a threat to a majority's faith in itself.

In the second volume, Tocqueville is no longer concerned with active majority coercion of a minority; now he is concerned with a whole society so pacified that it does not rule itself at all but rather delegates tasks of public order to bureaucrats. Here again Tocqueville takes a familiar image from the past, that of mass stupor, and gives it a distinctive cast. He sees public stupor in egalitarian societies produced not by the sloth of moral failure, but by anxieties and frustrations in the private realm which so entrap people that they have no emotional energy left for public commitments.

In both volumes, he attempts to expound these dangers of equality without therefore concluding that equality itself is reprehensible; his concern is rather to discover how people who grow up in egalitarian societies may avoid doing damage to themselves. Egalitarian societies face unique dangers of self-debasement, that is, of impairment of the quality of action and experience; these dangers, Tocqueville believes, are counterbalanced by unique claims of legitimacy unavailable to the members of societies of privilege.

Putting the Tocquevillean view of the dangers of equality this way jumps over the major problem and, indeed, the major weakness of Tocqueville's thought: what is equality? Further, what is its relation to "democracy," a word he uses sometimes as a synonym for equality, sometimes as a consequence of it? Tocqueville is an inconstant and loose writer; his intentions, however, are not inconsistent. One can piece together a workable, logical definition of equality from Tocqueville's writing. That definition derives from the "discovery" about equality that Tocqueville made.

Today we can think about equality in terms of two principles: *access* to resources or *distribution* of resources. In Western capitalist societies, the principle of access is called equality of opportunity; in socialist societies it is called "talent utilization potential." (This barbarism comes from the Soviet planner Djumenton.) The principle of equality of distribution is called in capitalist societies equality of condition, in socialist societies constant-sum distribution. Before Tocqueville, almost all discussions of equality focused on the question of equality of access, and identified the resources to be opened up as property or bureaucratic position. Tocqueville was the first to emphasize the importance of constant-sum distribution—equality of condition—in terms of a wider notion of social resources.

The result was a vision of society that today we would recognize through the Marxian categories infrastructure and superstructure. It would be absurd to make Tocqueville into a Marxian, but some of the Marxian categories do help clarify Tocqueville's intent. The infrastructure Tocqueville has in mind is economic, and a political order is built upon this base; democratic politics results from an equality of conditions. What are the "conditions" Tocqueville has in mind? Here again I find comparison to Marx useful, for Tocqueville means something by this word akin to the meaning Marx gave to the term "production." The equality of conditions Tocqueville envisions is an equal capacity to realize one's desires in action: one can have the same goods as other people, or the same kind of job, if one wants them; one's traffic with

others is predicated on the conviction that people could switch places, if they so desired. To identify the "condition" of society at its root with the possibilities of action is close to Marx's idea of production. The conditions of society so equalized have in turn little to do with the concept of equality of opportunity, for that implies mobility above others; it implies that the result of action will be the chance to occupy a new place in the social hierarchy. In Tocqueville's future world, hierarchy is gone, and all the possible routes of action in society are equi-valent.

What Tocqueville saw in America was the vision of a future Western world in which the realization of personal desire encountered no checks by virtue of the existence of impersonal hierarchy. What is powerful in Tocqueville's vision is that he saw, therefore, that other kinds of checks to desire, other deformations of action, would result precisely because there were no hierarchical hurdles to be overcome.

I think there are two ways to view Tocqueville's thought. One is to treat his work as a form of deductive description; it shows us a picture of equality in a society that knows nothing of feudalism or inherited hierarchy. The author draws deductions about what Europe too will look like, when once its feudal past is buried. In different ways, this was how J.S. Mill, Saint-Beuve, and Bryce read the book. There is a second way to read the book, not contrary to the first, but encompassing both the advent of industrial capitalism after the Jacksonian era and Tocqueville's own more visionary purposes. This is to see Tocqueville's as a utopian critique, a critique of what today is called the postrevolutionary problem. After the old injustices are banished, after a state of justice prevails, what within the revolution will be the human problems to be faced? The moment we stop seeing Tocqueville's fears of equality as *per se* conservative, he can be read in this way, and I think it is in this spirit he wished to be read. Assume that the distributive problem is solved: what problems does that very solution create?

Mob rule and mass stupor are the two dangers of equality that Tocqueville sees. They are contrary in structure. The first involves the majority as an active tyrannical force, suppressing minority opinion, deviance, or nobility of individual sentiment. The second involves a whole society composed of individuals each so self-absorbed, so anxiously bound up in questions of personal life, that none can participate with real passion in impersonal affairs or politics. These anxiety-ridden individuals are content instead to leave public questions in the hands of a soft and mothering state.

The fears of mob rule and of mass stupor were not newly born in Tocqueville's generation. The first has its modern intellectual roots in the doctrines of Hobbes, the second in the writings of La Boétie on voluntary servitude. But Tocqueville's generation, barely recovered from the first great political revolution in the name of equality, on the verge of an economic revolution that would end more decisively the *ancien régime*, felt each of these fears intensely. People sensed a future potential degradation of culture but could not find the right words to explain why. Tocqueville was the first to connect mob rule and mass stupor to conditions of equality throughout society, beyond the pale of political conditions or rights.

Tocqueville's arguments about mob rule appear in those famous chapters of volume one of the *Democracy* on the tyranny of the majority. Earlier writers who feared a mob thought of a rabble, the dregs of society, a vulgar majority, so that the question of tyranny per se became allied to the question of status. In the case of Montesquieu, for instance, this image of majority really was an image of a just hierarchy upset, with the least worthy, who were the most numerous, having control over their betters. Tocqueville's arguments about majority tyranny are more subtle.

He begins with a paradox: he regards as detestable the maxim that the majority of a people has the right to do any and everything it desires, and yet majority rule is the only feasible modern principle of legitimate power. To show that this paradox is not a contradiction Tocqueville advances three explanations. The first is an Enlightenment one. There is a universal society called humanity, and its ruling principle is justice. Each nation is like a jury called to apply this universal justice to particular cases; like any jury it can make mistakes. Thus the right of majority rule is at once legitimate and limited, and

when I refuse to obey an unjust law . . . I appeal solely from the sovereignty of a particular group of people to the sovereignty of the human race.

But what are the principles of this universal justice? Tocqueville does not tell us here.

An answer begins to appear in the second of three responses to the paradox of legitimate but limited majority rule, when he asks, what is a majority? He says that a collective majority is an "individual" and that this collective individual has interests and opinions like any person, equal therefore to those of that collective individual called a minority.

He poses a rhetorical question: when men join together in a collectivity, do they change their characters? Do people become more patient, or wiser, or in any way different when they act together? To this question Tocqueville gives a firm "no." That negative has great consequences. It means that he can treat the politics of society on the same terms as the psychology of an individual human being. Unlike Rousseau before him or the social psychologist Le Bon after him, Tocqueville here denies that the nature of the human being is transformed by social conditions; rather, society is a collective self.

I believe that this anthropomorphic image of collective life is what gives Tocqueville's writings in this first volume such vividness, such a sense of being very particular and personal even when making the most sweeping generalization. Equally, it leads him to a particular concept of justice in deciding how to protect the minority person against the majority person. This concept, rendered in modern sociological jargon, is "the maximization of countervailing power." There must be as many checks as possible to majority rule, in the form of complexities of interest that impede the majority from acting for the whole; these checks are created by making a multidimensional set of interests, so that the majority itself is never inherently one person, but a number of persons at the same time. Tocqueville insists that absolute pluralism cannot and should not be the result of fragmenting the majority's image of itself, for if the majority has no identity, then society will either enter into revolution or dissolve into anarchy. The principle of legitimacy (majority rule) is also a principle of order, but this order can only resist developing into tyranny if it contains contradictions within itself, so that the will of the majority is checked by those in the majority feeling themselves to have several collective personalities at the same time.

Tocqueville then brings into play his third idea, which is the experience of tyranny of the majority in an egalitarian society. Analytically, it may seem that such tyranny could appear in no other kind of society. This is not the case. The people do not have to take each other as equals to act as one to suppress dissidents or outsiders. But when they do take each other as equals, the dangers of tyranny of the majority have a special form and a special force. When a man or a group suffers from an injustice in an egalitarian society, Tocqueville asks,

to whom can he appeal? to public opinion? No, that shapes the majority's will; to the legislative body? No, that represents the majority and obeys it blindly; to executive power? No, the executive

is appointed by the majority and serves it as a passive instrument; to the national guard . . . to a jury . . . to (elected) judges?

In a society of equality of conditions there are no legitimate sources of countervailing power against the will of the majority, for egalitarianism diminishes those complexities between people that lead each man to think of himself as belonging to different kinds of majorities. Thus the greater the equality of conditions, the greater the potential of the majority to rule tyrannically, and under a system of absolute equality, Tocqueville concludes:

No matter how unfair or unreasonable the issue which injures you, it is necessary that you submit to it.

In the face of this stark conclusion Tocqueville does not abandon the idea of majority rule. Rather he sees the danger of tyranny as somewhat modifiable by purely political means, although politics can never “cure” these dangers. He envisions a legislative body, on the model of the American Senate, which “represents the majority without being necessarily the slave of the majority’s passions.” A decentralized administrative apparatus is another means to tame this danger, by depriving the people of a uniform, effective instrument of enacting its will, as is a class of lawyers with such great self-regard that they refuse to be the passive servants of the people and instead, out of their very pomposities and rituals, moderate the impetuosity of the people.

Finally there appears in this vision of majority tyranny in an egalitarian society an idea that, if not dissonant with the general outlines of Tocqueville’s theory, still stands apart from the logic of his main argument. Tocqueville argues that the effect of this tyranny is not merely to apply sanctions to the dissident, but also to seduce him.

Today we have names for this seduction: self-criticism, thought-reform, and the like. Tocqueville described it as the spirit of courtiers extended to the whole character of a society; everyone assures everyone else that he belongs by mouthing similar thoughts, equality of condition being ideologically confirmed by similarity of thought.

This problem continued to prey upon Tocqueville’s mind after he finished his first volume, and he took it up again in the second volume of the *Democracy*. In the five years that elapsed between these two volumes Tocqueville was able to see the effects of bourgeois monarchy in France, with its spirit of “cultural leveling in the midst of economic differentiation” (Raymond Aron). Tocqueville, it is said, was thus

disposed more and more to write about his American experiences in terms of cultural homogenization. Active mob tyranny is the danger of equality in egalitarian politics; another danger appears when one comes to consider equality as a cultural phenomenon.

This explanation, however, does not give enough credit to the interior strengths of Tocqueville's thought, especially his capacity for working through a problem so that by the time he arrived at the end of an idea, the beginning assumptions were transformed or reversed. Tocqueville worked through the traditional ideas of mob rule to a unique vision of majoritarian tyranny; one of the conclusions of that effort—i.e., that egalitarian societies are hungry for more than the brute domination of minority dissidents—led Tocqueville to transform traditional ideas of mass stupor into a new critique of egalitarian culture.

Probably the greatest writer on mass stupor before Tocqueville was La Boétie. This French writer of the sixteenth century was passionately concerned with voluntary servitude, and the qualities of his thought come through in such passages as these:

. . . so many men, so many villages, so many cities, so many nations, sometimes suffer under a single tyrant who has no other power than the power they give him; who could do them absolutely no injury unless they preferred to put up with him rather than contradict him . . . it is therefore the inhabitants themselves who permit, or rather, bring about, their own subjection, since by ceasing to submit they would put an end to their servitude. A people enslaves itself, cuts its throat . . . gives consent to its own misery, or rather, apparently welcomes it. . . . It is the stupid and cowardly who are neither able to endure hardship nor vindicate their rights; they stop at merely longing for them, and lose through timidity the valor roused by the effort to claim their rights, although the desire to be free still remains a part of their nature.

La Boétie's vision of voluntary slavery is of a moral condition; although such slavery is a collective phenomenon, it results from failings of personal character. Tocqueville replaced La Boétie's indictment of voluntary slavery as moral failure by a notion of voluntary slavery as social tragedy. However, by this point he had also replaced his own earlier notions of society as a collective person with a more truly sociological idea: society has the power to transform human character.

The curtain rises on this tragedy in the first chapter of the second part of Volume Two. Tocqueville declares, as he has in Volume One,

the primacy of the social experience of equality over the political experience: "Equality can establish itself in society and yet be absent in the political world." In the modern world, the desire for social equality is "ardent," while the desire for political liberty is weak. Why should this imbalance exist? Is there some inverse correlation between the two, so that the stronger the desire for social equality, the weaker the desire for political liberty?

To love liberty, to seek it out, requires a person to take risks, to deny the self, to be willing to disrupt the tranquility of personal life. The desire for social equality, on the other hand, is born out of the desire for tangible gratification, the desire to stabilize and tranquilize family relations. In the psychology of equality men cherish the illusion that, if once they can exist on a plane with everyone else, they will be secure in their enjoyment of the things and people immediately around them. Social equality is thus the means, supposedly, to "sweet pleasures" of everyday existence, while liberty demands the renunciation of these pleasures. Therefore, men are more ardent in their desire for equality than for liberty.

Having set up this imbalance, Tocqueville is ready to show how the pursuit of a peaceful *vie quotidienne* gradually leads people to a state of anxiety, unrest, and pleasurelessness, while instilling in them no contrary impulse for greater liberty. Tocqueville asks: What kind of person possesses the desire for peaceful personal life, given equality of social conditions? Tocqueville calls him an individual, the social condition he represents, individualism, and declares this condition a unique historical production.

Individualism is described as follows:

... a peaceful and moderated feeling which leads each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his equals and to withdraw within the circle of his family and his friends. Further, having created this little society for his immediate ease, he willingly abandons the larger society to go its own way.

Tocqueville is not using the term in the sense given to it later by the social Darwinists; his individualism is not a world of rugged struggle for survival, but exactly the reverse. Nor is this Jacob Burckhardt's use of the word "individualism" as a description of the modern spirit born in the Italian Renaissance. Burckhardt shows us men and women struggling to win praise from each other, to be recognized as "individuals" because of their special qualities. This display of *virtu* is anarchic but also involves a strong sense of community. Tocqueville

shows us men and women who no longer make demands on each other, save the demand to be left alone; his individuals do not want praise for being extraordinary, they want to be just like everyone else, so that no one will give them any trouble and they can, in modern argot, do their own thing.

But paradoxically this individualism arises only because a certain kind of group life exists. The desire to withdraw is created by a collective life in which social similarity holds out the promise that men will no longer have to delay gratification of their intimate, small-scale desires for comfort. With the theory of individualism Tocqueville became a true social psychologist, but a paradoxical one: the fantasy aroused by modern collective life is that one can withdraw from collective life. Everyone is pretty much like oneself, so one doesn't have to worry about violation or disruption; therefore, leave public affairs in the hands of the state and cultivate your garden.

I have used the word "fantasy" to describe the basis of this individualism, because it identifies Tocqueville's view of the relation of this collective psychology to collective reality in an egalitarian society. In fact, the practice of individualism does not lead to the rewards of intimate gratification; withdrawal from association with other people creates instead a ceaseless striving after pleasure. One attempts to gorge oneself on the "experiences" available to everyone in society because everyone is on an equal footing of action, but one moves from experience to experience, never feeling satisfied, never feeling the immediate and concrete is "enough."

How can equality of conditions produce meaningless experience, equally available for all? When Tocqueville turns his attention to the test for material well-being in America, he answers this question in a striking way. He propounds a theory that could be called horizontal mobility. The more a society destroys hierarchic barriers to action, the more the diversity of experience occurs within a single, central band; then the more people believe they must explore exhaustively all forms of living in order to be psychologically complete. Tocqueville contrasts this horizontal mobility with the deprivations of an *ancien régime* village by saying that those at the bottom of a hierarchy enjoy what is available to them while resenting at the same time the evils they presently endure, while the citizens of an egalitarian society discount the reality of their present condition and think only of the events and gratifications they have yet to enjoy. Whatever a person experiences at a given moment,

... he imagines a thousand other gratifications which death will keep him from knowing, if he does not hurry. This thought troubles

him, fills him with fear and regret, and maintains his spirit in a state of incessant trepidation; at every moment he feels he is on the verge of changing his designs and his place in life.

The images of anxiety in this second volume arise precisely out of the idea of an equalized plane of experience on which people's lives are not, however, identical reproductions of each other. Whatever is available must be exhaustively experienced; one has the illusion that only *after* this exhaustive consumption can one decide what one wants. The desire for what one hasn't is further genuine horizontal mobility; one doesn't want more in order to be *better* than other people. Tocqueville's thought on equality and mobility is therefore contrary to that of Ortega, who saw citizens of a mass society continually and fruitlessly attempting by their goods to declare the individual superiority of their persons. In times of either abundance or scarcity, for Tocqueville the operating principle of an equalized condition is that fixed possession is meaningless in terms of gratification; indeed, stability seems a premature death. The result is a society of anxiety, with constant declarations of what's wrong, and no clear sense of what is finally desirable.

Two political consequences follow from this restricted restlessness. Resistance to the state, the will to fight for liberty, diminishes. The ambition for liberty is too demanding to be easily meshed with the more fundamental kinds of ambitions an equal society of individuals harbors; moreover, it appears to be a betrayal to the others, who are simply trying to "find themselves," "make a life for themselves," engage in "self-discovery" through increasingly trivial forms of experience. The demand for liberty, like any other sphere, so threatens those absorbed in the "anxious, narrow tasks of individualism" that they interpret it as a form of personal insult. This is why, Tocqueville argues, if a man in an egalitarian state calls his comrades to arms in the name of liberty, their first impulse will be to kill him.

The second political consequence returns to the issue that bothered Tocqueville in his first volume: Why do egalitarian societies aim at more than the brute domination of dissidents, idealists, or critics, and instead try to reform the impulses of these challengers so that they too feel what the majority feels? Now Tocqueville can answer that psychological problem in social psychological terms. The idea that private anxiety is meaningless is intolerable in an egalitarian society. By a perverse and tautological chain, private existence, no matter what its present pain, must be meaningful in order for the individual to detach himself from the mass; he does so in the illusion that he can find, someday, a gratifying life in the personal sphere. A dissenter is

perceived as someone who refuses that act of detachment. This dissenter must therefore be made to cease criticizing the public order; he must be drawn into paying obeisance to it as just, in order that the very withdrawal of other individuals from public concern be justified. We often speak today of "pressures for conformity" without thinking much about what creates them; Tocqueville's analyses of ambition and egalitarian passion were an anatomy lesson on these pressures. His conclusion was that they do not arise out of the smugness of those seeking to make the others conform, but out of their very needs to validate the meaning of their individual frustrations, their sense that nothing is ever enough.

Tocqueville's genius was in seeing why the very forces that create individual anxiety also block the translation of private unrest into political discontent. Since all are equal, individual unhappiness is a personal failure; nobody seems unlike you, so if you are unrealized it is your own fault. Indeed, if the state were disrupted, then the individual would never have the chance to make himself into a real, fulfilled person. A society of equality promotes the illusion that politics is a diversion from the primary tasks of life, which are those of making meaning in the personal sphere. Better to let the state handle its own affairs, and you handle your own. Tocqueville wrote:

I see a vast crowd of people, similar and equal, who revolve without repose around themselves in pursuit of petty and vulgar pleasures, pleasures from which they hope to fill up their souls. Each person, withdrawn into himself, behaves as if he is a stranger to the destiny of all the others. His children and his good friends constitute for him the whole of the human species. As for his transactions with his fellow citizens, he may mix among them, but he sees them not; he touches them, but does not feel them; he exists only for himself and for himself alone. And if on these terms there remains in his mind a sense of family, there no longer remains a sense of society.

What does the political state look like in such a society? It is "absolute, highly articulated, regular, farseeing, and soft." It resembles a father who seeks to fixate those under his control in a condition of permanent childhood. It encourages the pursuit of gratification and does everything in its power to aid citizens in conducting this pursuit but discourages any criticism of the concept of gratification itself. And thus comes Tocqueville's famous indictment:

What I reproach equality for is not to lead men astray in the pursuit of forbidden pleasure but rather to absorb them wholly in the

pursuit of those pleasures which are allowed . . . it is likely that a kind of well-meaning materialism (*matérialisme honnête*) is going to be established in the world, one which will not corrupt the soul but enervate it and noiselessly unbend its springs of action.

Let us contrast this fear to the terms in which La Boétie described the dangers of mass stupor. In Tocqueville's work there is no indictment of the weakness of a contented mob of slaves; there is a mass so mystified, so deracinated by its own illusions, that it is caught in the correlated terms of private misery and public apathy. True, the pursuit of gratification is the rule of this egalitarian society, but gratification is no mere matter of passing sensual pleasure; it is more psychological, more the pursuit of "experience" in an attempt to establish a completed, individualized self. The more frustrating that pursuit, the more people are enmeshed in it; their very suffering creates commitment, deluding them more and more into seeking an "inner" answer to what appears to be an "inner" problem. This mass seeks either to exile or to coerce into obedience those who challenge this self-slavery, even out of the best humanitarian motives. A people so withdrawn from public concern is willing to leave to a paternal government the necessary and unpleasant tasks of thought reform.

Tocqueville tells us he had only "a glimpse" of such an egalitarian danger forming in the America of the 1830s. Today we have rather more than a glimpse of it in Solzhenitsin's documentary writings and in the works of Hannah Arendt. But these modern echoes are not quite what they seem.

The premise of Tocqueville's analysis is a society of equality of conditions, largely achieved. But we do not inhabit such a world. Neither in North America nor in Western Europe have differentials of possession, services, or income diminished since Tocqueville's time, nor has productive action equalized, nor do the facts of property or action show any real promise of doing so in the future. What then is it in this egalitarian critique that so illuminates the problems and discontents of nonegalitarian societies?

I think it is a weakness in his very formulation of equality that, paradoxically, makes Tocqueville's analysis of such contemporary relevance. Tocqueville's analysis of equality of condition refers not so much to an actually established equality as to the belief that such equality exists. People behave as if they are equal in condition. If in real fact they do not move roughly within the same band of action, in order to feel that they belong to a common social order they change their tastes, habits, and outlook to appear as if they do.

Tocqueville's writing is in this sense an ideology of equality. One of the distinctive marks of advanced industrial society is that such an ideology will be pervasive, even as real material conditions are vastly unequal and inequitable. There is in fact a positive correlation between the belief in equality of condition and the existence of unequal conditions. Challenges to the structures of inequality are deflected in a gross way by the illusion that "fundamentally" everyone is the same. They are deflected in a more subtle way by the creation of individualist mentality in the members of the society, so that they conceive of the responsibility for gratification and personal development as an individual matter.

The equation of private anxiety and public apathy can be recognized in the two great industrial nations of the modern world, the Soviet Union and the United States. In the Soviet Union, the idea that the essential tasks of redistribution are largely accomplished is enshrined in law, generally accepted in popular mythology if opinion studies are to be believed, and completely contravened by the facts of bureaucratic hierarchy and daily behavior. In the United States, it is the ideology of equal opportunity that is enshrined in official policy and disbelieved by a majority of the populace as an abstract proposition. But again, if opinion studies are accurate, in ordinary life people act as if the responsibility for their satisfaction in life is an entirely individual and private affair—exactly the consequence of what Tocqueville saw as a belief in an equality of condition. What, then, are we to make of the dangers of equality, or of an ideology of equality, that Tocqueville perceived? In the last twenty years, many radical writers in North America and Western Europe have turned away from the classical problem in political economy, that of domination, to attacks on inequality alone. All too often it is assumed that if social conditions can be equalized, then the problems of unjust domination will necessarily be solved. The import of Tocqueville's writing is to challenge this assumption.

POEMS

Two Poems by Elizabeth Fenton

THE DAYS AFTER NEW YEAR

The need to drink becomes at times overwhelming—
I can tell you this from my own experience.

There is nothing for it (January, after all)
but to project some movies onto the walls,

or look at the bottom of the beer glass—see if it's there.
Maybe it will be coming during the spring rains!

Surely—even without Mt. Fuji in the background—
it is possible to hear ahead of time the vibrations

of the geese and the wild ducks speeding northward
(though they may have only got things to the planning stage)

and to know that a kind of Brownian movement
will increase between us, between all of us now so hunched over.

But everything depends, of course, on the size of your stash:
how much hard cash you hold fixed in your several accounts,

knowing that the real message of the tinsel festivities
was: "I would if I could, *but*. Get yourself a regular income."

And you laughed and ate the roast, and leaned by the fire
with a sweet smile of gratitude and got thoroughly wasted.

That was the base camp before ascent of the mountain,
on which, if you go too slowly, you'll be left behind

for the monks from the monastery to retrieve sometime,
when they aren't occupied chanting, and can dig the yaks out.

In short, you fell. You fell and slid through winter
smiling insanely, still wearing party favors

on your hat, and clothes of respectability on your body.
You are beginning to glow, like a streetlight, from hunger

and, as the muscles start retracting from the nerve fibers,
your bones set up a dance that some find enchanting.

And what is that dance all about? O the savory mud flats!
Banks toppling into the brown swollen river;
the houses swept under, the corpses, the buzzing of flies. . . .

SATURN SONG

There was in me then all a simple singing,
when I was young, when I was young.

I was trying to be part of the love crowd,
a plenteous simplicity like the leaves.

I wanted to leap naked on the waterfall,
a part of the charm of the place like falling water.

I wanted my face to be an open flower
and all inside of me a simple singing.

So many knives have struck me since,
since I was young, since I was young.

I have reached my hands out, over & over,
nothing falls on them but the falling water.

I have raised my eyes up to the light,
all around me is darkness and silence.

I have foregone, I have gone into,
still I walk the same echoing corridor.

I have wanted my face to be an open flower
a plenteous simplicity like the leaves.

There was in me then a simple singing.
But so many knives and so many daggers.

So many attempts, so many escapades.
I never seem to arrive at the beginning.

I never walk straight into the sunlight
and into the sound of flutes from the foliage.

The singing goes on in me repeatedly,
and I am the flowers and the foliage,

and I am the sunlight, and the waterfall,
and I am leaves moving in gladness,

and I am the sole imagination
in the midst of this darkness and silence,

briefly singing and then lingering
and silenced at last by knives and daggers.

There was in me then all a simple singing,
when I was young, when I was young.

Carole Glasser

YOU WERE HER

The child you were is calling.
At night she wakes you; the world is gone.
You tell her she is smart. A rabbit
with a strong heart.
And alive. She breathes:

See. White smoke in the air.
Her eyes sting. She's caught
bare-faced, in the wind's grip.
Winter took her thoughts
and mixed them with the snow.

When the fire's out the coals glow. It's an old house
that rattles. If she leaves,
lights off, she takes the key.
One day she'll whisper, "Don't come near me."
Only you could have warned her and you were her.

Run with yourself, cowgirl
Disguised as a kid in a school yard.
Shadows did not trip you then
but later. You who knew how to balance.

Your room, in its way
is continuing: dark and private.
The past insists on decorum.
Only in your wildest thoughts
have you passed and seen the lights still on.

It's a net of light that pulls you back.
You are standing by the child you were.
This happens. You put your hands on her waist thinking,
"I cannot leave you
alone in this dark place."

David Bromige

MY CAREER

I can't abide people who start to talk as soon as they enter a room, without pausing to check out what's going on in there. That's what I think about growing up late in a slow time. As for sleeping dogs, shout & turn purple. My first words were "Fort" and "Da" so they put a box turtle in my crib which I took apart to see why it didn't tick. Fixed tunings and scales were invented, and the charm of single notes. A veil of melancholy slipped over my eyes and it was strange, this kid was putting stresses on syllables that were seldom under stress before. He got little more than a polite hand, or fingering, for words are not only the keys of persuasion, but so full of holes a bus could drive right through. Simply ask for a transfer. You gonna ride a *boxcar*?

It was very dark inside the fish. Trying to think without jumping. Little more than a fingerling, at the fascinating question, How did music begin? Kissing Joyce King in the fishmonger's doorway on Cricklewood Broadway — the world allows no hermits! There are two tragedies in life: the little yes, gone on a breath; I forget the rest. Time went haywire: there were always people in the time. Nothing taught sex was important: I could see well, if that's what a magnet is. "You liked my body?" "Yes — was that what it was?" And she was right, I represented a system. So, it was broken up. This is history. One blots out another. My voice ran on easily and garrulously, carefully dressing panic.

You won't see me in silk suits and Cadillacs, but I could never divorce them, and under the saint's robe one always senses the presence of the goat-foot. BAA, MAA. "Books! You get right out of this doorway!" To himself he was a man with a mission still unfulfilled. "Is Patience talking? *Is* Patience talking — God, do I hear her voice!" Competition is the keynote, sometimes appropriately justified as cutthroat. Were all these rejections justified? Had he indeed been a mere hunk of matter? Was his first wife really a tramp? He paused to scratch and thus upset the assembly plant. He selects with care that which is appropriate; he rejects the superfluous; too much discontinuity threatens the indentity of the person. "Just such as I am done with, hopefully." Wholly opposed to the use of examples which Plato introduced and philosophy repeated in its poetries ever since: as matters of indifference in themselves. The carrier of these projections may even become a special enemy, perhaps a *bête noire*. "That's my last duchess, browning on the spit." What is too silly to be said is sung. Lully died somewhat prematurely as a result of poor medical attention to a wound incurred by — of all things — striking his toe with a stick used to beat time. I lived on adrenalin. I surveyed the panic of rich women. What bliss when the iris came into being!

In 1968 I was 34 and, with something over 40 years of productive writing ahead, and my greatest yet to do, the life to follow had been marked out: gathering the ends and threads ten years in the making from the words of the best, the spells and blessings uttered in tight corners, out of my hands. If the artist is to endure, a change from the fevered pattern finally emerges. J. calls this new method a "sculpted creativity." I learned to read all over. 43, and not quite enough tin left to finish me. I was never into that thing about building a saleable character. Either they like me or they need more time. Each person's work seems to depend on and be connected with his neighbor's, and the whole posse appeared. But though he could make all these things, it is mentioned as a remarkable fact that with all his ingenuity, and after many efforts (for he made many), he never could make a wicker basket. These wearisome sickening little personal novels! Solemnity is a sign of fraud. Let's do something big for America! The crux is what happens in it, not a thesis or position — the texture, not the deductive or inductive curse of one-track minds. The door stood open. The long-sloping fall of haunches from the socket of the back sobbed bitterly. Logic might be unanswerable because it is so absolutely wrong. We're all plucked apples, so, let's make cider of a large question. The ant went up the pine. That's how I see "My Career."

Susan Astor

URBANIZATION

All night I hear the traffic rush like blood
And wake to find the city has moved in.
Jackhammers pound the ground outside my window.
Pigeons scuttle through the hall.
Strangers are busy in my closet;
Commuters ride the stairs.
The air is brown with smoke;
I am developing a cough.
All day thoughts rattle me.
I hear my blood rush like the traffic.

Philip Fried

UNWATCHED BIRDS

slightly disturbing and
elusive, they are like
the spots you see, blinking,

after you look too long
at the sun, & without a definite
home or even pattern

of migration,
they choose to undergo
subtle changes in size,

mode of flight & color
rather than fly
south for the winter

in fact this camouflage
is so artful they blend
in with all the other

birds & yet unlike
the others, their senses
(including infrared vision)

are augmented by a sixth
sense, for magnetism,
which guides their flight

according to the waverings
of earth's magnetic field
& its slow secular changes,

& they improvise makeshift
nests from the nests
other birds have abandoned,

as well as human garbage,
old bottles, boxes, cans,
& wrappers with forgotten language

Celia Gilbert

THE BOOK OF REVELATIONS

It is the winter light that knows us
by the laddering of bark,
by the nubs of buds set
defended and ready.

Arrived in the mountains at the frontier
“There was silence in heaven for about the space
of half an hour,”
that is the silence we know
contemplating our lives:
the child who set out with a magic stone,
the friend who left saying we would be together,
the burning house that set us free.

In the winter light we are stripped away
“and I am commanded to write these things.”

Alan Nadel

TO OCTOBER

Your invasion is gentle coercion,
the curve of a revolution
that started before
that arrived.
Here where something is always turning—
tempers, tides, the color of trees—
you slowly take root
to pillage a trace
of life;
I knew,
or else to ease a serum in
that cues the foliage
and sets a tint
of fire in
the under-
brush,
so that before your leaving,
sunset *mansions*
may seem
aflame,
as though
our motion
were a match
to torch the eye
of one great fall
and not the early harvest part
of all we ever knew
we must take in.

Alfred Corn

GLOZE

Life breaks its contracts and its pact with death.
Is it what we expected? Out as in,
Up, down—a seesaw of thought to season

Part of the pain, winter turning autumn,
The soldier rising from his grave? Light falls
On the man, but he does not become it.

A man who walked three nights and days never
Assumed that august personage was less
Imposing for his deeds of separation.

Our calling for pomp, our parading death
Is no absolute; and we live without
A hope of memorial, as though days

In future time, a season of banished
Desire, when the wind sings and never stops,
Or when the blue wind stops and goes over

To the despair of means, will fade into
Voiceless heavens. The clouds remain and go
Under the dark. Nevertheless, in us
Their direction finds a ghostly echo.

Keith Waldrop

HOW TO TELL DISTANCES

Proclus rises from the
surface of the moon, between
fecund and serene
seas, both dry. Long
corridors and unexpected
rooms. One hears
the voice of the page,

aware of bosom. Emphasis
on the simple solids. All our
decorations temporary, dry
panels, friezes.
A side gate promises
unconsidered scenery. We spread
into definitions.

You are welcome to this
map, though it does not
begin to chart the necessary
roads to any real event.
What is a cause in
general? All the elements of the
universe, with the single exception

of yourself. Most poems, later
or sooner, go unread. I measure
things by my own
change of place. Intense original
heat gradually
radiating into empty
space. Note Leibniz Mountains.

Ghosts of authorities. All
one and all not-one. Mermaids and
dragons, goat-footed Pans, statues
that move without contact. The structure
of the cosmos and the
structure of Greek
logic both distant as

the moon. Some symbols intelligible
only to the gods. A last
something. Let me put this finally
in your hands. Disintegration, if
on all levels at once, is
positive. It's touch and go.
Gifts are brief, unaccountable.

Marilyn Hacker

ADULT ENTERTAINMENT

Agreed: familiarity breeds
confusion; cautious consistency is better.
You would be harried; I (and she) be hurt.
Sane speaking distance is safest and best.

Under an academic tweed
jacket, over a secondhand Shetland sweater,
a cotton jersey and an undershirt,
your naked hand welcomes my naked breast.

Morris Dickstein

REMEMBERING F.W. DUPEE

The death of F. W. Dupee in January deprived the literary community of one of its most elegant and playful minds. A warmly admired figure from the first generation of New York intellectuals, Dupee was neither a prolific critic nor a typical academic, though he reviewed many books and taught at Bard and then Columbia for many years. Like Edmund Wilson he was simply a man of letters, a nearly extinct species. His finely crafted pieces belonged to a waning tradition of serious belles lettres: the lost art of the literary essay, swamped by decades of "practical" criticism and turgid theory. When he sent off letters of recommendation for students and colleagues, department chairmen wrote back to compliment him on his style. I can't believe he ever wrote a bad sentence.

Style meant a great deal to him, both in life and in art, but he was neither a dandy nor an aesthete. Fred Dupee was a dapper and dignified man, but his puckish side could turn good form into a comedy of manners. He didn't value form or artifice for their own sake, though he relished the sheer verbal bravura of a Gertrude Stein or a Nabokov. He praised Gide's "tireless habit of self-cultivation," which was also his own. In an oblique self-portrait, he said that Gide "helped to rehabilitate that word *amateur*, which has been made disreputable by the modern pride in pure creation and unremitting professionalism." Dupee's writing was not confessional and introspective as Gide's was, but both still showed traces of the eager adolescent who could never quite decide what to *do*.

Like many intellectuals Dupee flirted with politics without being a political person. Born in Chicago in 1904, educated at the University of Illinois and Yale, he spent the early thirties playing the adventurer in Spain, North Africa, and Mexico. When I tried to imagine his life then, which I knew nothing about, I could only think of movies like *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* or *Only Angels Have Wings*, or stories I'd heard about gunrunning in Cuba and Palestine. He too had trouble conceiving the person he had been. As he looked back at his journals thirty years later, he said he felt they belonged to someone else,

Back in New York in the mid-1930s, Dupee joined the Communist party and made some comical forays as an organizer on the waterfront. For a brief period he was literary editor of the *New Masses*, but by 1937 he helped refloat *Partisan Review* as an anti-Stalinist journal devoted to independent radicalism and modernist aesthetics. On the whole he had too much *joie de vivre* for politics, just as he had too much fellow feeling for *l'art pour l'art*; he later wrote tellingly of one writer's split between the "citizen" and the "wanderer." By the time I got to know him at Columbia more than twenty years later, he was more the civilized wit and raconteur than a veteran of the turbulent 1930s.

At Columbia and to the world at large he was a little overshadowed by Lionel Trilling, a close contemporary, whose interests and sensibility overlapped with his. But Dupee recurrently attracted an ardent undergraduate following distinct from Trilling's. Preeminently a man of ideas, Trilling appealed most to the budding intellectuals, the bright, aggressive overachievers hungry for cultural authority, while Dupee attracted the poets, aesthetes, and campus wits, hedonists more eager to please themselves. As a militant intellectual myself, I was late in appreciating how much thought he could distil into a sentence without noticeable strain or effort. Yet writing did not come easily for him. Reviewing *The King of the Cats*, his superb 1965 collection of essays, Elizabeth Hardwick observed that he seemed to wait upon inspiration to fulfil even the most casual commission.

Lightness of touch was crucial to his writing—a feeling for nuance and tone, the evocation of atmosphere. He was as hooked on the comic spirit as Trilling was on the tragic, and his best sketches were of great comedians, Dickens, Nabokov, Beerbohm, Chaplin, the New York poets, even Thomas Mann. He rebuked critics for being "engulfed by Mann's own omnivorous critical intelligence" and for making heavy weather of his metaphysics, and he was wonderfully attuned to the social comedy in Henry James, another writer easily overwhelmed by critical abstractions.

Dupee's point of view was not antiintellectual but he was against criticism that milked art for its "ideas" and themes without being alert to its relation to lived experience. He believed that "culture was founded in experience" and that "knowledge is always primarily personal." Here, on the subject of Chaplin's tramp character, is a specimen of his lively, concrete, and sinuous literary style:

Charlie is a dream—but a dream that much solid stuff is made of. In the way he twitches a property mustache or slices with a knife a derby hat doused in a creamy sauce, believing the hat to be a real pudding, there is a multitude of all too human suggestions. Twitched mus-

taches are implausible by nature. All dinner party embarrassments approximate to the impact of cold steel on creamed felt, setting the teeth on edge.

This is compact writing and eloquent, demonstrative thinking, but above all it is sensuous and immediate in its feeling for art, for life. Dupee's prose can be almost voluptuous in its fluidity and critical refinement. Yet he had an Augustan epigrammatic wit and a born ironist's seismic sensitivity to cant or pretension. Chaplin's childhood, he remarks, "was made to order to destroy a waif or foster a genius." Dupee paid tribute to artists and intellectuals more single-minded than himself but he disliked humorless moralists and ideologues. "A student did once tell the present writer that Chaplin's style lacked 'moral reference' and was a little dated. It is the unfortunate student who seems a little dated now—if such things matter."

Among the few negative pieces in *The King of the Cats* are reviews of F.R. Leavis's intensely partisan book on D.H. Lawrence and James Baldwin's eloquent sermon, *The Fire Next Time*. He finds Leavis's pages "acrid with the smoke of old feuds" and complains that Baldwin, after his first two books of essays, "has exchanged criticism for prophecy, analysis for exhortation." Dupee's attack on Baldwin dismayed me when it first appeared in *The New York Review of Books*; it seemed to reveal the limitations of his Apollonian civility. It looks more defensible today as the prophetic mode has run its course and sometimes left chaos in its wake. But Dupee's recoil from Leavis and Lawrence—like Edmund Wilson's from Kafka—shows us the Achilles heel of his catholic sensibility. His receptivity was enormous but it closed down before the passion of an evangelical temperament bent on a consuming mission, burning for conversion and salvation.

In the range of his taste and the stylishness of his writing, Dupee resembles another English critic very different from Leavis—V.S. Pritchett, like Dupee a cultivated comic ironist adventuring among the world's classics. Both of them treat criticism as a contribution to literature as well as a comment upon it; both write exquisite prose and manage to strike a delicate balance between aesthetic appreciation and moral seriousness; both are exceptionally novelistic critics who love to tell stories and sketch characters, who love variety and vivacity and are drawn to literature out of an interest in life, not a recoil from it. Dupee's curiosity made him an avid traveler, though, unlike Pritchett, he wrote few travel pieces. He saved his tourist lore for his friends.

At Columbia Dupee's openness and his perpetual curiosity were translated into an unusual accessibility to students and junior instructors. Later in California he said what he missed most was having

students come by, though quite a few old ones managed to drop in. In the late sixties, in his own sixties, he had the venturesome temperament of a man thirty years younger. Unlike some of his colleagues he bore his reputation lightly, with a twinkle of irony that may have concealed a sadness about the things he might have done but knew he never would. Once I remarked that his discussions of Henry James's novels had the freshness of contemporary reviews, the responsive kind James almost never received in his lifetime. Unexpectedly he seemed a trifle hurt, for *Henry James* was his only "real" book. "I suppose I've always been a journalist," he said ruefully. In fact no journalist was ever more of a real critic, whatever such a distinction might mean. The same tender nerve was touched when I wrote in a book that his mock-heroic account of the Columbia student disorders in *The New York Review* in 1968 was "an almost novelistic evocation." "But true," he wrote to me, with unusual emphasis, as if either of us thought of "novelistic" as the opposite of veracious!

Dupee may have felt impaled by that time on the horns of the Yeatsian dilemma—perfection of life, *or* work—for he had chosen to savor the moment rather than make full use of his literary gift. Had he been more ruthless or ambitious he would never have given as much of himself to his friends or students. His wit was legendary. We heard it crackle after he was selected by students at Columbia to receive their Mark Van Doren Award for great teaching. At the official dinner there might have been a temptation to solemnity, except that the guest speaker was Dwight Macdonald, an old college friend, and Dupee kept interrupting him with barbs from the other end of the dais. Macdonald shot back in kind—it was a vaudeville routine they must have been improvising for forty-five years, and one of the funniest acts I'd ever seen.

As a student a decade earlier I had observed Dupee do a series of turns almost as hilarious in Columbia's august colloquium on great books. The other instructor was Sidney Morgenbesser, the university's most quick-witted philosopher and kibitzer, whose analytic ability could devastate any statement into its logical (or illogical) components. Dupee was all nuance and sensibility, Morgenbesser all intellect and argument: two more mismatched minds—and evenly matched wits—could hardly be imagined. For several weeks the duel raged, with tongue-tied students enjoying the spectacle too much to intervene. Once, after one innocuous student observation, Morgenbesser began a surgical dissection of the hapless speaker's "thesis." Dupee erupted with exasperation: "That wasn't a thesis," he fumed; "it was just a remark, a comment, an aperçu." With that remark hostilities ended and

the course began in not-quite earnest. I think they later became good friends.

Dupee thought of his own essays as “remarks,” impressionistic shafts of illumination rather than formal analyses. This put him at odds not just with philosophers but with most academics and students of literature. But the English Department at Columbia had its own strong undergraduate teaching tradition, once exemplified by men like John Erskine and Raymond Weaver, later by Van Doren, Trilling, and Andrew Chiappe, for whom the professionalism of modern criticism was like Swift’s “mechanical operation of the spirit.” Their approach was thoroughly unacademic: Victorian in its impulse to direct celebration of great books and writers, classical in its appeal to an older idea of the academy. Dupee had no doctoral degree and no “field”—he taught everything from “Modern Writers” (which he initiated) to “Shakespeare” (which he undertook shortly before retirement)—but here he found a suitable niche and some very sharp students.

During the campus uprising in 1968 he was far more sympathetic to the students than most of his contemporaries. He spent untold hours with much younger faculty trying to avert a police showdown, which came anyway. He was a genuine liberal, usually a quiescent one, but Vietnam revived in him the political indignation of the 1930s. Plagued by a lung condition resembling emphysema, he returned from Washington demonstrations looking more dead than alive.

Dupee retired from Columbia in 1971, sold a house he loved in upstate New York, and moved to a spectacular site overlooking the Carmel Valley in California, where he hoped to breathe better air. To my astonishment he retired as a writer as well. He imagined he was facing death and could not go on as he had been. As his health improved he continued to read, to think, to travel, to write long, amusing letters to friends, even to teach for short periods at Berkeley and Stanford. But for reasons of his own, like an actor unwilling to return to the boards, to try yet another impersonal audience, he refused to write for publication.

Inevitably, as his silence continued, his reputation—never very firmly rooted in academic circles—began to decline. But he wrote too well to be long neglected; though his body of work is not large, his perfectly sculpted pieces should survive as both mandarin prose and keenly discriminating criticism. As he himself said of the unclassifiable Max Beerbohm, another writer who insisted on retiring, “he is still a wonder, a precious anomaly, at once great and small, easy to forget but delightful to remember.”

Peter Brooks

DEATH OF/AS METAPHOR

Susan Sontag in *Illness as Metaphor* has once again written a challenging essay, in the best sense of that term: a trying-out of her searching intelligence in the illumination of a mostly obscured area of our culture. *Illness as Metaphor* opens up new territory to thought. One may wish that the book were longer, more detailed, that it pursued and worried more of the quarry it turns up in its path, and that it reflected more on the nature of its hunt. But the sense of incompleteness we may feel upon finishing the book is no doubt the price of its polemical vigor.

In addressing the uses of illness as a figure or metaphor, Miss Sontag starts from the premise that “illness is *not* a metaphor, and that the most truthful way of regarding illness—and the healthiest way of being ill—is one most purified of, most resistant to, metaphoric thinking.” Thus her inquiry is dedicated to “an elucidation of those metaphors, and a liberation from them.” The substance of the essay is the elucidation of the metaphors of illness, and it is the kind of task that Miss Sontag has always carried out with a rare penetration, a capacity to turn one metaphor against another with the polemic thrust that lays bare the unrecognized cultural assumption, the cultural unconscious that underlies the use of metaphor and its passive acceptance as literal explanation, consubstantial with its object. Yet to the extent that the desire for liberation seems to repose on a premise that language might be purified of metaphoric thinking, the project is clearly impossible, and impossible in a way that casts light not only on the nature of our metaphors, but on why we have them and need them in the first place.

Miss Sontag claims (no doubt correctly) that illness as metaphor is used at the expense of the literally ill: it compounds their physical illness with a cultural judgment, moralizes their position as other, abnormal, ill-omened. Metaphor has a tendency to naturalize a given condition, to make it, through the play of comparison, reconnect with accepted ways of looking at the world, with a moralized network of

ideas and beliefs which must always imply, in the case of illness as metaphor, that the disease is somehow chosen; if not deserved, somehow justified. Miss Sontag's essentially ethical stand against the use of illness as metaphor reminds me of Alain Robbe-Grillet's celebrated pronouncements on the need to banish metaphor from literature. Robbe-Grillet contends that metaphor is treacherous because it entertains the notion of a link between consciousness and the phenomenal world which is illusory. To talk of a pitiless sun or a house nestled in the valley is to assume that human consciousness is at home in the world, that it has appropriated things to the states of the soul—which then leads to alienation and tragedy when man discovers the world to be other.

In their antimetaphoric stances, both Robbe-Grillet and Miss Sontag point to something essential in the motive for metaphor. Metaphor is of course a way of dealing with the unknown and the unnamed through analogy with the known (or else, in reverse, defamiliarizing the too-well-known); it is an equation from the known to the unknown. In this sense, all the distressing metaphors of the "war on cancer," which Miss Sontag so deftly selects and catalogues, stand as signs of an hysterical defense against the unknown. The declaration of metaphorical warfare, whether it be on cancer or crime or poverty or inflation, inevitably implies that the enemy is both too fearsome and too occult simply to be eliminated. The metaphors of cancer treatment inevitably suggest struggle with the melodramatic cosmic Other. If we knew what cancer is, we wouldn't need or want them; if we could cure cancer, the treatment would have a simple medical description.

The other major disease which has been spectacularly metaphorized by human culture is, in Miss Sontag's argument, tuberculosis. Here the metaphors are different, in part because the disease appeared to lend itself to different images—the consumption of the grosser flesh, the etherialization of the victim, unthinkable in relation to carcinomic growth—and partly because the culture itself was different. Miss Sontag pursues a very interesting brief exploration into the literary iconography and ethics of TB in the nineteenth century and the use of what must have been a painful and horrible disease to identify and dramatize those chosen souls whose sensitive, poetic, refined natures meant that they could not be long for this earth, whose very weakness was a sign of poetic (and erotic) election. That the consumptive appearance could actually become fashionable in the nineteenth century, a sign of dandyism and artistic gift, offers a strange perspective on the vast transvaluation of values, called Romanticism, which inaugurated the modern era.

The attention to and romanticizing of the TB victim must in a larger sense have corresponded to a desire and a need to recuperate the disease and its effects to a system of human meanings, to make it signify in human terms. Miss Sontag points out that for the Ancients, disease was often an instrument of divine wrath, a judgment meted out to the community. (The same could be said of later visitations of the plague.) The Romantic era, which was busy making the individual ego the center of the universe—since traditional transcendent Sacred terms of meaning had lost their coherence and assent—needed a modern, individual fatality: a disease which selected the individual, and conferred on him a special destiny. Miss Sontag writes:

It is with TB that the idea of individual illness was articulated, along with the idea that people are made more conscious as they confront their deaths, and in the images that collected around the disease one can see emerging a modern idea of individuality that has taken in the twentieth century a more aggressive, if no less narcissistic, form.

This is absolutely right, but when Miss Sontag goes on to argue that the notion of the “interesting” (illness makes the individual stand out as “interesting”) is “nihilistic and sentimental,” she lets her ethical sensibility get in the way of her job as cultural critic.

For the point is surely, as the above quotation suggests, that the nineteenth-century use of TB belongs to a continuing need to recuperate the fact of death to our sense-making systems. Mortal disease becomes an important literary and cultural *topos* because it represents a dramatized approach to death, a threshold to the final unknown, and becomes exemplary as the inhabitation of future death within life. It becomes the vehicle by means of which a culture seeks an articulation of the meaning of life through that death—exemplary, summary, articulate—which defines the meaning of life. Walter Benjamin argued in one of his essays (“The Storyteller,” in *Illuminations*) that we feel that the “meaning of life” is defined by death, by the final endstop that gives the whole statement of a life its closure, and hence its intelligibility. According to Benjamin, what we seek in fictions is knowledge of death: that knowledge which is denied to us in terms of our own lives. The great storyteller is he who can make us feel that a certain death, the right death, lies in wait for his fictional characters. In that typically modern form, the novel, the genre of man’s transcendental homelessness (Benjamin here is citing Lukács), death becomes the moment of illumination and communication, the candle at whose flame “we warm our shivering lives.” Death is to Benjamin “the sanction of everything the storyteller has to tell.”

In this perspective, TB in nineteenth-century literature, from the sentimental moralities of *La Dame aux Camélias* to the introspective debates of *The Magic Mountain*, appears as one strategy in the recuperation of death to human meaning, making death the significant, revelatory, achieved endpoint of the individual's life: that final moment which casts retrospective illumination on the whole of a life. TB was in the nineteenth century a particularly apt representation of what the signifying death should be since, as Miss Sontag points out, it was a death that preserved and even heightened consciousness at the end, while the earthly self was, as the metaphor had it, consumed. It was an illness leading inexorably to death (at least in literature), and accompanying the movement toward death with an increasing lucidity about the meaning of the self and its individual destiny. To paraphrase a remark of Sartre's, such characters became their own obituaries. The deathbed scene has great importance in the nineteenth-century novel precisely because it is a privileged moment in the clarification of meaning, a moment where the sense of a life is passed on to the witnesses of the death, as to the reader. Death very often takes the form here, not so much of a labelled and documented TB as of a general consumption, the eating away of flesh by spirit, the consumption of matter by meaning, of life, finally, by literature. The literary death by consumption is ultimately perhaps an image of the processes of writing and reading: the transformation of life into meaning.

Hence while Miss Sontag undoubtedly is right that literature in the Romantic tradition glamorizes and moralizes what was surely a beastly and degrading illness, we should at least recognize the motive and intent of such literary presentations of TB and acknowledge that they had a certain logic, perhaps necessity, in the long history of man's attempts to come to terms with death through making it a significant statement about life. The death of the individual by TB—that is, of a person chosen by a special fatality to undergo death in the midst of life—offered at a certain moment in the history of ideologies and mentalities, in a world where traditional Christian consolation in “meditation on the happy end” no longer possessed the force of conviction but where death still had to be confronted with the fragmentary ruins of Christian humanism, a choice literary *topos* by which to speak of death, of life, and of the very project of literature itself.

When we move from TB to cancer, from the Romantic tradition to postmodern culture, it is striking and ominous that we appear to have left the realm of literature. As Miss Sontag notes, “Cancer is a rare and still scandalous subject for poetry; and it seems unimaginable to aestheticize the disease.” Cancer, an unseen disease within the opaque

body, often attacking parts considered ignoble, does not lend itself to the aesthetic. And Miss Sontag is surely right in suggesting that it is madness (specifically, I think, schizophrenia) that has taken on some of the glamor of TB for a certain tradition of modern writers. But if cancer has not generally become a literary *topos*, it may have to do also with some breakdown in the recuperative power of the human imagination, and this may be less a factor of the nature of cancer than of a changed conception of death. As Miss Sontag writes, "For those who live neither with religious consolation about death nor with a sense of death (or of anything else) as natural, death is the obscene mystery, the ultimate affront, the thing that cannot be controlled. It can only be denied." To cite Benjamin once again, dying as a public act has been lost from the culture, and with this the sense of any possible relation between death and life.

In dealing with cancer, as with death itself, we are mainly reduced to the writings of the "experts," either the medical profession itself, or those professionals of associated therapies who treat the terminally ill. The business of dying, like undertaking at an earlier stage of the culture, is becoming professionalized, and the literature of cancer is not the work of poets and novelists but of thanatologists. I don't mean to sneer at the motives of the therapists of death, or to belittle the help that they provide, but only to suggest that in the perspective of cultural history they constitute another step in the desacralization and de-signification of death. The story told by Philippe Ariès in his recent monumental history of human attitudes toward death, *L'Homme devant la mort*, is one of a progressive loss of relation between the living and the dead. We have reached the point in our culture where there is precious little relation left between life and death, and the consequences seem to be variously despair, denial or (since the humanist tradition tenaciously hangs on) a certain stoicism.

In a desacralized culture, it is perhaps inevitable that a prevalent form of thinking about cancer should be the psychosomatic, the argument, which Miss Sontag forcefully rejects, that cancer strikes at certain "character types," that it is a symbolic exaction of payment for repression, a vicious form of return of the repressed. Miss Sontag finds her best spokesmen for this view in the Freudian fringe represented by Wilhelm Reich and Georg Groddeck. Groddeck, for instance, describes illness as "a symbol, a representation of something going on within, a drama staged by the It" We may think of this as a final, perverse version of the peculiarly modern attempt to recover illness and the body for meaning symbolically. The source of such a view is indeed in

Freud (and before him in Schopenhauer): hysteric illness is quite precisely metaphor to Freud, the symbolic representation of the unconscious repressed. Freud indeed may represent a last stage in the nineteenth-century enterprise of trying to reconquer for meaning areas of human experience threatened with a loss of meaning in the wake of the collapse of traditional signifying systems, but in a mode of thought that moves beyond traditional scientific notions of causality toward a complex semiotic premise, in its attention to a rhetoric of representation, which is most fully elaborated in the analysis of the dream work. Freud himself carefully avoids the facile characterological approach. And when Miss Sontag writes, "The promise of a temporary triumph over death is implicit in much of the psychological thinking that starts from Freud and Jung," one must underline the "starts from," since Freud himself can hardly be accused of the denial of death, nor held responsible for the dumb optimism that so much psychotherapy has become. Freud's views remained imbued with the inheritance of tragic humanism, and some of the most remarkable of the metapsychological essays—I think in particular of *Mourning and Melancholia* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—represent heroic attempts to rethink the significance of the incorporation of death with life.

The word "cancer" itself, we should note, is not the scientific label or description of a disease, but the description of the visible effects of the disease, the tumor, likened to the legs of a crab (the Greek *karkinos* and the Latin *cancer*, both meaning crab). Miss Sontag cites this etymology, but refers to it as the "literal" definition of the disease, whereas it is clear that the literal, as so often turns out to be the case, is radically figural. The radical metaphoricity of the term perhaps makes it inevitable that it will be used *as* metaphor, in a doubly metaphoric way, as a kind of equation with two unknowns. In traditional rhetorical terms, I suppose that cancer might be typed as a *catachresis*: the name used where there is no literal, no "proper" name for a thing, as in (the traditional example) the "leg" of a chair. Indeed, some contemporary theoreticians of rhetoric would have it that the peculiarity of literary language is that it constitutes an act of discovery that all language is radically metaphorical, always in a state of displacement from literal denomination of its referents. When Miss Sontag argues that it is not morally permissible to use cancer as metaphor, we may find her ethically noble but utopian, caught in a Platonic dream of a language which would give direct access to realities rather than the displaced symbols of realities. No doubt she is not so naive as to mean this literally: really she wants us to get rid of metaphors whose

implications we can't control, which are loosely used and come to be taken as literal. What is needed is not elimination of the metaphor, but the constant showing up of metaphor for what it is, through counter-metaphor, through the rhetoric of exposure, which Miss Sontag so effectively manages.

Illness as Metaphor is wholly successful as polemic and as provocation to the rethinking of cultural metaphors. Without wishing it otherwise, I cannot help but feel that Miss Sontag could tell us much more about the subject, that she is in a position to undertake, somewhat in the manner of Michel Foucault, a more sustained "archeology" of the idea of illness in our culture. In particular, one would like to hear her at greater length on the perception that madness has become the modern glamor disease: what was originally a brilliant metaphor for the decentering of perception (in Rimbaud, for instance,) has degenerated into an irresponsible literalness, so that one can find serious writers proclaiming that the discourse of schizophrenia is the only authentic language of our time. Susan Sontag sometimes denigrates the essay, suggesting that her real creative work lies in her novels and films. But the creative essay in the critical history of cultural ideas, a form more honored in the European tradition than in ours, is something we need, at present, even more than good novels and films. *Illness as Metaphor* is so richly suggestive, in its brief compass, that I wish Miss Sontag would return at greater length to the essay, to that elucidation of the modern cultural unconscious which she performs so well.

BOOKS

QUEER LOVE, FORBIDDEN LOVE

MELVILLE. By Edwin Haviland Miller. Pursea Books. \$7.95.

DOUBLING AND INCEST/REPETITION AND REVENGE, A SPECULATIVE READING OF FAULKNER. By John T. Irwin. Johns Hopkins University Press. \$11.50.

The Jacksonian term for *homoerotic* is *adhesive*. When the phrenologist who did Walt Whitman clenched and calipered the bardic head, he discovered a large and unblushing bump that signified *adhesive, adhesive, adhesive*. Years later, when D. H. Lawrence read *Leaves of Grass*, there was the bump in the poetry, the stickiness of the adhesive embrace. "And the motion of merging," Lawrence wrote, "becomes at last a vice, a nasty degeneration, as when tissue breaks down into a mucuous slime." No wonder Hawthorne dropped his veil when Melville adhesively demanded a show of the naked breast. Melville spoke to Hawthorne straight from the center of "Song of Myself." "But I felt pantheistic then—your heart beat in my ribs and mine in yours, and both in God's." One can easily imagine the pensive frown that crossed Hawthorne's face when he discerned this ardent embrace and saw the doubling at work in it.

Edwin Haviland Miller's biography of Melville is certainly the boldest account of the old tar's life to date. After Melville meets Hawthorne in 1850, Miller argues, everything Melville writes is about Hawthorne, for Hawthorne, to Hawthorne. At once the beloved figure of Isaac and the cherished icon of Apollo, the Preferred Brother, the Handsome Sailor, Hawthorne tentatively permits an intimacy. Melville writes *Moby Dick* in its fostering glow. But as Melville's affection thrives, as he writes cheerfully about Socratic hugs and ineffable felicities, Hawthorne gradually disengages himself, and soon the door is shut. Plainly speaking, Hawthorne breaks Melville's heart. Orphaned, outcast again, Melville is left to tell the tale. And such is the story told in this biography, a tale of unrequited love.

There are hazards in reading Melville's fiction beneath this torch: *Pierre* is so construed that Hawthorne becomes the shadow of Lucy, Falsgrave, Isabel, Glen Stanly, and Plotinus Plinlimmon. Yet Melville did appreciate the force in Ahab's monomania. And he did examine early and late the lineaments of ungratified desire in Billy Budd's

archetypal face. An obsession to be with “blue-eyed Natty,” to dive deep in long talk, passing the tankard, relighting a cold cigar, this is a conceivable obsession to assign Melville. When Melville reconsidered his unfulfilled friendship with Hawthorne in *Clarel*, he wrote bluntly:

But for thy fonder dream of love
In man toward man—the soul’s caress—
The negatives of flesh should prove
Analogies of non-cordialness
In spirit.

Melville had himself thought through his yearning for camaraderie to the positives of flesh, but this is not the question in Miller’s biography. Other critics have already characterized the route of sexual preference in Melville’s fiction. And G. J. Barker-Benfield’s recent study of male sexuality in the nineteenth century, *The Horrors of the Half-Known Life*, which takes its title from Melville, explains that preference in great detail. Miller retraces the appearance of the adhesive feeling in Melville’s writing, the Hawthorne factor, but he is ultimately concerned with the effect of this feeling. And that interest throws a strange light on the whole book. Although Miller seems to fault Hawthorne for his chaste distance, in the end Miller, too, steps back from the stickiness of Melville’s embrace. Lawrentian repugnance, that distaste for broken tissue and slime, is discreetly stated in liberal terms:

Billy’s fate confirms that the hermaphroditic icon is life-denying, or, more kindly, life-evading. Billy and all the handsome sailors want out from adult heterosexuality: they want to be neither husbands nor fathers. The underscored references to Billy’s impotency—his neuter state, as it were—reveal all too clearly that behind the icon or fantasy lay the author’s fear of genitality and his disgust with the insatiable demands of sexual urges.

Behind Miller’s assault on the hermaphroditic icon lies the familiar Pauline accusation of homosexuality. *Contra naturam*. Finally the icon denotes narcissism, Miller asserts, “which, as Melville hints in the opening chapter of *Moby Dick*, may be ‘the key to it all.’ Narcissus, we recall, perished of self-love.” And so does Satan. And so do we all, one by one. Melville and Hawthorne doubtless saw in narcissism everything that Miller sees, and more. The myth is not merely an exemplum for them, a sign posted near the brook, but a truth smiling at us. Billy Budd and Donatello. Where does Miller get the idea that the hermaphroditic icon is life-denying? From medicine perhaps,

certainly not from literature. Here is the icon as Robert Bridges sees it, as Melville saw it, as it is:

Surely thy body is thy mind,
For in thy face is nought to find,
Only thy soft unchristen'd smile,
That shadows neither love nor guile,
But shameless will and power immense,
In secret sensuous innocence.

Having worked first on Whitman (*Walt Whitman, A Psychological Journey*) and now on Melville, Miller has written in sum the standard heterosexual critique of the overt and latent homosexuality of the two preeminent American writers in the nineteenth century. And done the predictable job. For in this version Whitman and Melville are lonely frightened men who “want to be neither husbands nor fathers,” and whose art suffers therein. When Miller looks ahead to Melville in the Whitman book, his thesis is already truculent. Melvillean criticism, he warns us, should not blind us to

his failure to encompass the full gamut of emotional experience. The magnificent universe unfolded in *Moby Dick* has the flaws of its principal (castrated) characters: Ahab is a physical and emotional cripple and coward, and his “crazy” pursuit of the white whale, couched as it is in Elizabethan rhetoric, disguises his psychological arrestment and his evasion of adulthood; Ishmael, too, is regressive in his adolescent infatuation with Queequeg (partly concealed by his protective comedy), in his mooning over the sperm oil (which becomes almost a parody of Whitmanesque friendship), and in his final “salvation,” the triumphant orphan-bachelor-artist.

Worshippers of Billy Budd’s comeless beauty have a distorted picture of human sexuality. Miller’s demystification of Melvillean language hits the truth (always in parentheses or italicized) with the sensitivity of a club. When you’ve finished reading Melville, read Frank Harris and then there is the full picture. Indeed Miller cites Harris at one point in his book on Whitman, quotes approvingly Harris’s opinion that Whitman’s sexual vision was somewhat lacking. Righteousness stalks through both biographical studies. Melville and Whitman write with power, they are “great” writers, but their art is incomplete. They are incomplete, arrested, emotionally crippled men who evade adulthood. Miller’s psychological descent into Melville’s life and work leads us finally past Hawthorne to the mute evidence of the separate bedrooms in the Melville household.

What is wrong with all this? What is wrong with all this is that it is so appealingly obvious. If one is an adult heterosexual, happily married, sane, an emotionally balanced, outgoing and tolerant extrovert, or just an adequate husband and tolerable father, this is precisely the view to hold of Whitman's and Melville's strangled life. They are not the peers of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, questioners of "health" and "normality," thinkers who think through the commotion of their desire, but instead the precocious sons of Rip Van Winkle. A healthier Hawthorne flinches from Melville's sickness, from the narcissism that hisses in Melville's poignant overtures, the stickiness of the adhesive embrace. By far the best section in *Melville*, and the most disappointing, is Miller's juxtaposition of *Pierre* and *The Blithedale Romance*. Through the coupling of Hollingsworth/Coverdale, Pierre/Plinlimmon, Melville and Hawthorne rethink the troubled course of their friendship. But Miller adamantly deals with the exteriority of these characters. He focuses, for example, on the similarity of Hawthorne's and Plinlimmon's contemplative gaze, on Pierre's oedipal trepidation, and on the bearlike monstrosity of Hollingsworth. Using *Pierre* and then *Clarel* against *The Blithedale Romance*, Miller "reconstructs" what happened between Melville and Hawthorne. Not surprisingly he concludes that Melville sought lasciviously to come between Hawthorne and Sophia. Conversation is melodramatically supplied from *The Blithedale Romance*. Like Hollingsworth, Melville at last implores: "be my friend of friends forever." Like Coverdale, Hawthorne replies: "I have never found it possible to suffer a bearded priest so near my heart and conscience as to do me any spiritual good The task belongs to woman. God meant it for her." So the slap is given. In this crucial chapter, interestingly enough, Miller relies almost exclusively on Hawthorne's ostensible telling. What he overlooks is that Plinlimmon is also given words in *Pierre*, a discourse. If we maintain the logic of Miller's conflation of texts, this discourse must then constitute Melville's ironic, cool, thoroughly dispassionate judgment of Hawthorne. Miller does not discuss Plinlimmon's text. This aspect of the Melville/Hawthorne friendship, the side wherein ideas are exchanged, is generally ignored. Miller's eye is fixed on Melville's hand and Hawthorne's knee.

In fact, Plinlimmon is a philosopher of time, an intellectual tease who preaches the doctrine of "virtuous expediency." He is a smug, suave, blue-eyed abomination. History is Maule's Curse, the inexorable transmission of hurts, so one adjusts to it, the way of the world. One trims his metaphors carefully. "In short," says Plinlimmon, "this

Chronometrical and Horological conceit, in sum, seems to teach this:—That in things terrestrial (horological) a man must not be governed by ideas celestial (chronometrical); that certain minor self-renunciations in this life his own mere instinct for his own every-day general well-being will teach him to make, but he must by no means make a complete unconditional sacrifice of himself in behalf of any other being, or any cause, or any conceit.” How that long sentence is stretched. Pierre Glendinning is fooled into awe, but not Melville. We will hear this voice again in American literature. The priest in Faulkner’s *A Fable* speaks to a doomed corporal who resembles Billy Budd. Sell out, the priest urges, betray yourself. We all have, we all do.

It wasn’t He with His humility and pity and sacrifice that converted the world; it was pagan and bloody Rome which did it with His martyrdom It was Paul, who was a Roman first and then a man and only then a dreamer and so of all of them was able to read the dream correctly and then realise that, to endure, it could not be a nebulous and airy faith but instead it must be a *church*, an *establishment*, a morality of behavior inside which man could exercise his right and duty for free will and decision, not for a reward resembling the bedtime tale which soothes the child into darkness, but the reward of being able to cope peacefully, hold his own, with the hard durable world in which . . . he found himself.

Like Faulkner, Melville knows the voice of the devil. He heard it in Hawthorne. Do not sacrifice yourself. Plinlimmon’s text breaks off. When extended, the doctrine of virtuous expediency becomes the consecutive sayings of Poor Richard. Pierre is spared the aphorisms. When he finally meets Plinlimmon face to face, Plinlimmon appropriately has nothing to say.

The traffic between life and art is heavy in Miller’s biography. That Melville needed and cherished Hawthorne is certain. That Hawthorne failed him is highly probable. The space in which Miller works is speculative. For the Melville he creates is taken largely from Melville’s fiction, warped around a set of mythological presuppositions, and then bound by a reductive reading of Melville’s florid letters to Hawthorne. Once this system of transference is established, everything is possible. Melville’s life and Melville’s art fall into an amazing series of exact correspondences. Brilliant biographies are of course written on this very principle of imaginative speculation, but Miller’s *Melville* is not one of them. If Melville and Hawthorne ever discussed the problem of narcissism, of egotism, it is a fair guess that Melville dominated the conversation, and was less the egotist for it. Did

Hawthorne hold up his end of the dialogue? What did Melville think of Hawthorne's intellectual reticence? The complication of their thought is surely as important in their friendship as the relativity of their sexual stance. In sophistication and depth, language and form, *Pierre* is a far greater novel than *The Blithedale Romance*. Even in despair, Melville's wit always crackled with an ironic hilarity. Whereas Hawthorne's conceits have a tendency to creak, especially in *The Blithedale Romance*. With the same evidence that Miller exploits, one could argue that Melville outgrew Hawthorne, that Hawthorne in his silence was trying to think of something to say, that Melville in short was not betrayed or abandoned, but sorely disappointed. That it was Hawthorne who saw in Melville's beauty the icon of Orpheus, who feared the risk of the song, but who nonetheless furtively signaled: be my friend of friends. Which Melville generously encouraged. Melville did need Hawthorne. Before 1850 he had subsisted on a steady diet of Duykincks. As a writer Hawthorne was a peer. He had looked into places Melville knew. But he also cautiously tended his reputation. When, much older, the two writers tramped around the sand dunes on the English coast, little had changed. Hawthorne laconically records that Melville is still at it, still hammering away at the knot binding free will to foreknowledge. Presumably Melville again did most of the talking.

What Miller slights in his biography, the writer thinking, is carefully respected in John T. Irwin's *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge*. Irwin collapses several Faulknerian novels, principally *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, into a single Faulknerian meditation on narcissism and revenge. History is Maule's Curse for Faulkner: sons choke on the blood of their fathers, the oedipal deadlock repetitively engenders incestuous brothers and sisters, a succession of violence, and that is the substance of Faulkner's perfect understanding of the darkness of history. But Faulkner, Irwin argues, also considered in his structuring of time and passion the image, if not the possibility, of sacrifice. Irwin's close reading of this widespread Faulknerian meditation appropriates a series of theoretical models, Freud and Rank on incest and the double, but it is his interpretation of Guy Rosolato's discussion of the different politics involved in the Isaac/Jesus sacrifice that makes his reading of Faulkner truly speculative. Faulkner constantly ponders the significance of Christ in his fiction, the meaning of sacrifice as the resolution or pseudoresolution of the oedipal curse, the repeated fall of man. And that finally is Irwin's subject in this book, the nature of sacrifice, the severance of the knot.

Religion, he asserts, "attempts, successfully or not, to release man from this spirit of revenge through the mechanism of sacrifice and the alliance of the father and the son. In sacrifice, the impulses of the father against the son and those of the son against the father are simultaneously acted out on a symbolic, mediatory third term, so that the contrary impulses momentarily cancel each other out in a single act with a double psychological significance." So it is, but where does this happen in Faulkner's fiction?

Irwin's elaboration of the oedipal and incestuous pairing and doubling in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* is exhaustive, an involuted and labyrinthine analysis that draws us massively into the deep folds of Faulkner's pessimism. Through Quentin Compson's dual role in these novels, Irwin reveals the mirroring structure of both the Isaac and Jesus sacrifices, but Faulkner's treatment of this structure is ironic, a savaging of the news in both the Old and New Testaments, and so at last Irwin turns to Faulkner's most problematic novel, *A Fable*. Here, like Melville in *Billy Budd*, Faulkner draws clearly the face of the hermaphroditic icon, poses in the Christlike corporal a feminized redeemer who refuses the phallus, the world. Some readers may look askance at the weight given this strained novel in Irwin's analysis, but its congruence in Faulkner's thought is nonetheless important. Yet even here, in this allegorical *Summa* of Faulkner's themes, Irwin is obligated to defer the question of development in Faulkner's consideration of chronometrical sacrifice in horological time. In dealing with incest and repetition, Faulkner repeats himself. He returns again and again to the scene of the crime. Do not eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Do not know the world. Be in it. It is the question that Quentin continually asks: can I love without knowledge, can I love the muddy meaning of Candace without knowing it? Faulkner's Christ ultimately *is* about his Father's business. The knowledge he offers is not of this world. And so the old contract is not transformed; it is brilliantly rephrased. Irwin brings to bear on this question in Faulkner's art the thought of Freud, Rank, Nietzsche and Guy Rosolato. He might well have observed that Kierkegaard has also reflected on this subject.

There are essentially three movements in Irwin's complicated, often abstruse book: an unraveling and exposition of the oedipal tangle in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, an attempt to measure Faulkner's conception of the role of sacrifice in human history, and ultimately a sacramental divinization of Faulkner the writer as Christ the sacrifice, an exchange that makes his books the

bread of life. No one could help but be charmed by the poetic elevation of Irwin's summary, which turns from the history in Faulkner's fiction to sanctify the act of writing fiction. And yet there is a confusion in this metaphorical crossing of the sacred and the profane. On the one hand, writing "is sacrificial and mediatory, a gradual sacrificing of the self in an attempt to attain immortality through the mediation of language," and on the other, writing "is a narcissistic mirroring of the self." In the psychodynamics of composition, the writing self is divinely bisexual, pen on paper, engaged in a self-dismemberment that transforms "necessity into a virtue, *ananke* into *virtù*, a fate into a power." Fiction thus slips the knot binding free will and foreknowledge. Billy Budd ascends on the yardarm, ascends into the realm of song. But the writing of that apotheosis, Irwin is bound to say, is itself an act of rebellion, Melville's narcissistic thrust against the time that Billy Budd leaves, jerked aloft. A character in one of Faulkner's early novels says in effect: you don't commit suicide when disappointed in love, you write a book. Irwin is laudably torn by the mystery of that equivalence. And because he himself is a writer, hanging on in the teeth of disappointment, chewed by loss, he accords to writing the true nobility of sacrifice. The turns and slips of Irwin's analogies in this final section are fitted one by one to Faulkner's contradictions. I am the sacrifice, but I repeat and repeat.

The ending of Irwin's book is not strong; it falls away affirming Faulkner's enduring sense of loss. It ends with a set of clichés. Yet *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge* is nevertheless a provocative examination of Faulkner's fiction. Irwin's reading of Quentin's role in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* is lucid, closely reasoned, and in his analysis of Thomas Sutpen's dream of a Baronial Self he catches up entire the fabric of Jacksonian consciousness. But why does Irwin slight Kierkegaard so severely in this analysis? Kierkegaard has a whole book on repetition (Irwin gives it passing mention) and like Rosolato he has studied the sacrifice of Isaac. Theological inquiry plays covertly throughout Irwin's structural interpretation and surfaces finally in the consecration of writing, that Faulknerian identification of the artist with Christ. Kierkegaard does not significantly enter Irwin's discussion because he already is in the flow of Irwin's thought. The treatise, "Of The Difference Between A Genius And An Apostle," which distinguishes absolutely modes of writing, begins: "What, exactly, have the errors of exegesis and philosophy done in order to confuse Christianity, and how have they confused Christianity?" Or, what has knowledge done to love? That is

where Melville begins, where Faulkner begins, where Irwin begins. Robert Bridges's poem ends:

O king of joy, what is thy thought?
I dream thou knowest it is nought,
And wouldst in darkness come, but thou
Makest the light wher'er thou go.
Ah yet no victim of thy grace,
None who e'er long'd for thy embrace,
Hath cared to look upon thy face.

NEIL SCHMITZ

INTERIORS

DETOUR. By Michael Brodsky. Urizen Press. \$8.95.

Michael Brodsky knows nothing of reticence. Or tact. He writes in what could be called the tradition of Great Ranters, of Norman Mailer, Henry Miller, and Philip Roth—obsessed excavators of bumpy inner terrain. Both the charm and the frustration of this tradition lie in its infantile, exhibitionist quality: the novels it produces tend to be marvelously, liberatingly undignified but, at the same time, disturbingly arrested. This mixed aspect is reflected, too, in the writing, which is frequently dazzling but strangely limited in representative power; the world of these novels is an intensely privatized one, without conventional give-and-take. Dramatic interchange between characters is rare, almost as though the primal fissure between inner and outer, between the imperious writerly self and the created written selves that intrude their presences into the narrative, has not yet occurred.

Michael Brodsky's first novel, *Detour*, is remarkable precisely because it explores the condition of its own involution—an "I" constantly threatened by its potential for extinction in the face of other, competing "I"s—with an arrogant disregard for anything but the entanglements of that condition. *Detour*, therefore, is not, as one of the jacket-blurbs has it, "implicitly about growing up in the 1970s." Perhaps the novel's acute, chronic disengagement is characteristic of the 70s, but it is hard to see where *Detour* is "about" anything other than its own meticulous, privileged sensibility. It is, in fact, the sort of

novel which gives serious contemporary fiction a bad name, and helps to explain why most people contentedly wallow in pulp-fiction. *Detour* is more radically disdainful of its audience than, say, Renata Adler's *Speedboat*, which at least went through the gestures of rustling up a subject, even if that subject proved only to be a certain style, an elegant mode of perceiving a vastly inelegant world. The narrator of *Detour* has not gotten that far; Brodsky writes brilliantly, assuredly, but that brilliance cannot be said to have solidified into a style, because it is concerned with something more elementary, with that which predates style: identity. "Where was the caretaker for the stall," Brodsky writes, "where was the staff member like Steve to examine my urine, to decide whether I was innocent or guilty, man or child, man or woman, living or dead, solid citizen or derelict, nice guy or deviate?"

Detour has to be acknowledged, critically speaking, less for the ways in which it approximates other novels than for the ways in which it departs from them, even fraudulently. Brodsky has unlearned all the age-old, circumscribing rules of storytelling: he *shows* nothing and narrates everything. The idea of "character" falls hopelessly by the wayside, although there are several differently-named speakers who hold forth in similarly congested, intermittently fascinating monologues. "Anne," for instance, is a former heroin addict whom the unnamed, first-person narrator meets at the Thalia movie theater. Within no time she is asking piercing visceral questions—"Are you a virgin?"—and the narrator is answering with the agile intellectualizations that are his stock-in-trade: "I am a virgin . . . But even if I were to fuck you I would still retain my virginity. Virginity is incessant. Why does one fuck herald the end of apprenticeship. Every woman is different. Every other woman would still be a threat, a challenge. And anyway, virgin is viable, black is beautiful, gay is good, epileptic is echt. We live in the age of the slogan."

Their relationship follows an uneasy course as they take walks in the Village and along the Upper West Side. Eventually, after several lengthy soliloquies in which Anne has proven herself to be the narrator's equal in maladaptive tendencies, she accompanies him to Cleveland, where he is to begin medical school. Once there they meet up with Steve, who is roaming the streets in search of people to share his house with him. They obligingly take up residence with Steve and his roommates, a social worker and another medical student; Linda and Ed are cheery, *lumpen* types who go about their daily lives untraumatically, without the extraordinary difficulty in accomodating themselves to the habit of existence that Anne, Steve and the narrator all share: "There were no more roles, there was no spontaneity, there

was only laborious camouflage, the minimum of hubbub to camouflage a long joyless vigil that was called living.”

The narrator abortively attends classes, abortively makes love to Anne, takes a part-time job teaching in a language school from which he is fired. He has, it appears, not yet been fully born: “For all of my posturings I was only a superannuated fetus.” Even the language he uses with such fierce skill is not his birthright: “‘Cut it,’ I said. I never use that expression. From whom was I borrowing it. One wintry night he would bang at my door and demand payment for unauthorized use of phrase and inflection.” He decides to pull up his shaky, newly-acquired roots and flies to Canada, where he wanders around various cities (“I had intended to go to Toronto but I found myself in Montreal”) for several days, absorbedly poking at his psychic wounds. He goes to the movies, which, throughout the novel, feature as his great passion—allowing him to escape from his relentlessly, derisively observing conscious self into “the sacred time of celluloid,” where he floats peaceably among borrowed, star-touched selves. He imparts some of his impressive, rehearsed-sounding observations to a girl who stops him in the street: “I grew up among Jews And I never associated them with the sexual urge. They always seemed to have too much contempt for it And yet I am pleased they are more than human. They don’t drink or beat their wives They evicted the goyische part of themselves. They did not have time for tenderness, tenderness was an impediment on the way to self-defense.” The girl is confused by this fellow who darts around, pecking at his tiny crumb of brain-food like a frantic sparrow; what she does understand is that he doesn’t want—can’t tolerate—unmediated, “goyische” forms of nourishment: “‘You don’t have to make love to me,’ she said.” Then, quixotically, he decides to return to Cleveland and arrives home to find Steve on the sofa, caressing Anne’s foot. The novel closes on a resigned sentiment, expressed straight-facedly by an unironic personality but which resonates with an almost noble irony within the context of *Detour* because it is a long-deferred concession to the public domain, the first chink of daylight to penetrate a womb-like atmosphere: “For a change Ed had the last word. ‘You do what you have to do.’”

It is hardly surprising that Brodsky’s narrator, like Alexander Portnoy, is fixated on bowel movements, especially paternal ones; he can, indeed, be seen as an attenuated, less earthy version of that earlier Jewish Son—swamped in the same anguished self-consciousness, a terror of being-in-the-flesh so extreme that it traverses the neurotic into the painfully, tellingly absurd. But most *unlike* Roth, Brodsky has

dallied in the recent literary pyrotechnics of the academy, with rather unfortunate results: his efforts to ease the pressure of literary depiction by translating human conflict into semantic tension ring false: "It is a terrible concession to make the crossover of the white space beloved of Mallarmé." Such derring-do, like his fondness for obscurantist *lingua franca*—"telos," "reification," "plenum"—and his overuse of the absence-presence dialectic—"I know the difficulty of being another's imminence"—so dear to structuralists, shows up what could be Brodsky's most potentially grievous flaw: his precocity. *Detour* reeks of its own talent; it is uneasily ahead of itself, racked by an off-putting discrepancy between intellectual savviness and emotional naiveté. Too often Brodsky's precocity fails to rise to the occasion it sets for itself and totters into mere showing off; see how many books I've read, movies I've seen, paintings I've studied, records I've carefully listened to. One pays attention at such moments the way one would to a feverish, brainy child—wearily indulgent of its assumption that *every* permutation of thought, *every* vacillation of emotion is of supreme concern.

"I was guilty of inbreeding," Brodsky writes, ever the astute observer of flawed performance, his own included, just as he has earlier commented upon Ingmar Bergman's "preoccupation with artistic, masturbatory, pathologically detached types." In some vital sense Brodsky's criticism of Bergman can be applied to himself: *Detour* is, finally, pathological in its lordly detachment, its shimmering isolation; it is comprehensible without being altogether accessible. But if the novel doesn't quite "rend the tissue of solipsism," it has taken a compelling, valiant stab at liberation. Michael Brodsky has written a heady, compelling account of those interior lower depths in which normative, unspoken boundaries have collapsed. "Collusion with his captors," writes Brodsky about one of his many cinematic aliases, "frees him from himself, his hands need no longer go through their futile exercises, their parody of self-manipulation." Shades of Beckett, and Dostoevsky, of all the underground men who strive to transform impediment into grace, who write their way up into "the ration of blear we mistake for light" and thereby provide a necessary and difficult illumination.

DAPHNE MERKIN

REMAKING THE SELF

THE LEFT-HANDED WOMAN. By Peter Handke. Translated by Ralph Manheim. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. \$7.95.

Since Peter Handke is only thirty-seven and continues to write in bold new ways about the processes by which language and the self are dissolved and may or may not be reconstituted, reviewing his latest book is likely to be a slippery experience. The conventional strategy in the weeklies is to play up the elusiveness: bizarre, enigmatic plots, unfathomable characters, dry yet evocative language, a self-cancelling dialectic, and a string of resemblances to such guileful masters as Kafka, Wittgenstein, Beckett and Robbe-Grillet (nearly all of whom Handke has understandably forsworn).

Although *The Left-handed Woman* (the most recent of Handke's books to be translated into English) has already generated considerable enthusiasm and uneasiness, the process of understanding its peculiar distinction, or even what it is actually about, seems hardly to have gotten under way. Both Paul Gray and Ernest Pawel (admirable reviewers for *Time* and *The New York Times Book Review*) correctly treat it as a strange kind of feminist fable. They call it "haunting," evoke Wittgenstein, praise Handke's chiseled evocation of ominous states "beyond the power of words to express and minds to grasp," and then drift off into evasive praise. Yet to describe Handke as a philosophical poet who creates fictions about ineffable menace is to say only the first and certainly not the most interesting thing about him.

In fact, the most striking feature of *The Left-handed Woman* is not its ineffability but its marvelous concreteness and precision—not what it doesn't communicate but how much in eighty-odd pages it manages to get said. Concreteness for Handke, though, does not mean what it meant for Henry James and others, who believed solidity of specification to be the yardstick by which novels were measured. Or rather, it is a more contemporary kind of specification that mixes the plausible observations and details of realistic fiction with the uncanny occurrences and intuitions of fable, combining them in a cool, deceptive shorthand that illuminates different kinds of reality all at once.

The thirty-year-old Marianne and her husband Bruno, a successful executive for a porcelain firm, live in a comfortable bungalow just outside a West German industrial city. They have an eight-year-old

son, and when the novel opens Bruno is momentarily expected home from a business trip to Scandinavia. These are the literal facts, tersely presented yet testifying to the substantiality of the novel's bourgeois world. At the same time there is a persistent sense of incipient trouble and disorder, stirrings from worlds that daily habit customarily cloak. Facts are presented as if from an angle slightly askew; phrases and details do not fit and small oddities of gesture, speech and behavior quietly erode the sense of general well-being. A description of the exhausted Bruno arriving at the airport tells us that he always wears a double-breasted pin-striped suit, walked in his sleep as an infant and talks in his dreams as a man. The word "bent" comes up just a few times too often; Marianne is regularly called "the woman" and Stefan "the child"; and when he writes a school essay on "My Idea of a Better Life," all the items repudiate his present existence and are themselves contradictory. And Marianne herself, though very much part of the depersonalized world, has perceptions that seem at times preternatural. So when Bruno arranges for a romantic night alone with his wife, we are ready for almost anything, but not quite for what actually takes place. The morning after, Marianne tells him of a sudden, unnerving intuition that he will some day abandon her and orders him to leave at once. As if they were figures in a fairy tale, the man and woman treat the illumination as peremptory. He moves out and she begins a new life alone with her son.

All this in the first twelve pages of the novel.

The adaptive process dramatized in the middle section is jagged and painful, and as convincing as anything of its kind I remember having read in fiction. Marianne cries unexpectedly and sometimes sleeps on the floor of her son's room. She rearranges furniture, idles about the supermarket, and buys more food than she needs. Resuming work as a translator, she looks for liberating messages in the texts assigned, but finds only soothing conventional wisdom useless to her now. She refuses to join a women's group, dances alone, sweats a lot, falls asleep at the movies, takes long walks in the woods, and when she goes to the mailbox, finds only junk mail, "no handwriting except perhaps the imitation script of advertising circulars." Sometimes she talks of looking for contentment, at other times of running amok. Sitting outdoors in a rocking chair, she does not rock. Throughout the erratic process, she gently ignores the warnings and threats of her friends and husband—all of whom have stock explanations of what she has done (historical circumstances, following fashion, etc.) and rejects their advice as a too-familiar effort to define her in other people's language.

If the opening twelve pages of *The Left-handed Woman* have the engrossing power of a realistic fairy tale, the middle section (for all the continuing oddity) has the fitness and accessibility of art based on unerring, intricate perceptions of how people really live. But it is the closing scenes of the novel that are in many ways the most original and difficult to absorb, and are likely to ensnare imaginative readers well into the future. Just after meetings with Bruno and her father that allow Marianne further to revise her sense of the intimidating past, she decides to walk with Stefan up the mountain behind the bungalow in which they live. "I've never been to the top," she tells her son; "Bring your new compass." The night before the climb, she listens again and again to a song called "The Left-handed Woman"—a cryptic, insinuating lyric in which left-handedness, doing things against the grain, is seen as a possible way of continually recreating one's individuality and achieving the poise to remain "alone among others." Part of the provocation of the song is that Marianne's reactions to it are never described and in the events that follow its implications are by turns validated and denied.

The walk up the mountain is one of the most beautiful and suggestive short sequences Handke has yet written. At first, the February sun shines as a somber light, but as Marianne and her son move past a drained fishpond, a Jewish graveyard and a quickly flowing brook, she becomes increasingly sensitive to all the stirrings of the physical world. They laugh, picnic, warm one another, share bright memories of the past, and she tells of having once seen a curious sequence of abstract paintings entitled "Stations of the Cross." She asks Stefan to photograph her with "an ungainly old Polaroid," and he produces a slanted shot from below revealing to her something of how grown-ups really look to children. Back home, they bathe together, her work goes more swiftly, and the bungalow seems to belong to the forest and the darkening sky.

From this time on, Marianne has a spontaneity and ease that appear almost magical. By chance she spots Bruno on the street and whimsically buys him a cashmere sweater, pacifies a crying baby, begins reading newspapers, asks what month it is, and starts inviting people to come by to see her. In the last long scene of the novel—an hypnotic, ritualized gathering—all the characters of her recent life (the husband, friends, associates and strangers) do drop by her house in heavy rain to dance, talk oddly, embrace, quarrel and part. As usual, the details suggest both an increasing self-sufficiency and the imminence of danger. Marianne moves about the gathering alert, accommodating, hospitable yet detached, reluctant to judge, eerily in tune with

other people's rhythms. When a friend says: "We were expecting to find the loneliest woman on earth," she replies, "I apologize for not being alone this evening. It's quite accidental."

But a storm is raging outside and when Bruno asks whether she has decided what she is going to do with her life, she tells him: "No. For a moment I saw my future clearly and it chilled me to the bone." After the visitors leave, she cleans up, looks into her eyes in a mirror and says: "You haven't given yourself away. And no one will ever humiliate you again." Suddenly she jumps up and begins sketching:

. . . first her feet on the chair, then the room behind them, the window, the starry sky, changing as the night wore on—each object in every detail. Her strokes were awkward and uncertain, lacking in vigor, but occasionally she managed to draw a line with a single, almost sweeping movement. Hours passed before she laid the paper down. She looked at it for some time, then went on sketching.

And the novel ends:

In the daylight she sat in the rocking chair on the terrace. The moving crowns of the pine trees were reflected on the window behind her. She began to rock; she raised her arms. She was lightly dressed, with no blanket on her knees.

A queer, celebratory ending, but tempered by disturbing premonitions and many unanswered questions. The heroine has convincingly learned new languages for getting more accurately in touch with herself and the world of objects around her. Yet proud solitude is achieved by rejections and withdrawals and an estrangement, the consequences of which remain unclear. The peopled world is curiously distanced, almost drugged; and even the son with whom she shares so much seems unnaturally passive. The hint of autism in the concentration of her sketching reminds us (as do other details) that the liberating new modes of self-expression are also capable of chaining her. Dreamy vigilance may be another kind of trance. In this remarkable novel (as in his other fine book, *Short Letter, Long Farewell*) Handke is providing a fresh, engrossing fictional demonstration of Walter Benjamin's aphorism: "All decisive blows are struck left-handed." But he is demonstrating too that the process of remaking the self can be violent, risky, wayward, provisional, always in motion, with all questions of certainty suspended.

LAWRENCE GRAVER

INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS

FREUD, JEWS AND OTHER GERMANS: MASTERS AND VICTIMS IN MODERNIST CULTURE. By Peter Gay. Oxford University Press. \$12.95.

A CONFIDENTIAL MATTER: THE LETTERS OF RICHARD STRAUSS AND STEFAN ZWEIG, 1931–1935. Translated from the German by Max Knight. Foreword by Edward E. Lowinsky. University of California Press. \$8.95.

“The writing of German history,” says Peter Gay, “is laden with, mainly unexamined, counter-transferences.” How right he is, and how desperately that examination needs to be undertaken! Gay begins the task of reexamination in this volume as he in turn takes Sigmund Freud out of Viennese society and defines him in the German cultural world, and as he denies a Jewish thrust at the heart of “modernism” in Wilhelmine German culture and the culture of Berlin. He also analyzes the self-hatred of Wagner’s Jewish conductor Hermann Levi, defends Johannes Brahms as a “modernist,” and salvages the reputation of Wagner’s *bête noir*, the music critic Eduard Hanslick. Gay’s thesis is defensive—against the no longer relevant early twentieth-century conservatives, anti-Semites, and the Nazis, who attributed to the Jews the corrosive forces of socialism, pessimism, liberalism, expressionist theater and literature. Jews and the cultural forces they represented were hated and feared by the German right as symptoms of moral decay. Gay correctly points out, this was a German “decay” which many non-Jews fostered and most German Jews resisted rather than welcomed.

Ten years ago Peter Gay published a book arguing that all those who embodied the rich culture of Weimar, those who created the modern movement: “Jews, democrats, socialists,” were “in a word, outsiders” of the preceding Wilhelmine Imperial era. Although the styles, careers and accomplishments of the Weimar Republic had antecedents in the Empire, they had existed as an opposition. With the birth of the German Republic the forces of modernism became “insiders” for a brief fourteen years of crisis-ridden cultural flowering. Weimar was a hothouse of intensive creation and criticism, of new art forms, theater, literature, architecture, burning at a white heat as though its participants knew disaster was close—that it was soon to be consumed forever in an historic catastrophe.

Now Gay insists that German Jews were not primarily modernists and that cultural “outsiders” or modernists were not Jews. This places Gay in the forefront of the reestimation of the German-Jewish heritage that currently engages leading scholars of Germany. In 1975 Gerson Cohen pointed to the “bad press” that German Jewry has had in recent historical literature. He called for “a more complex and balanced perception” and “a new respect for German Jewry coupled with sympathy and even empathy.” Fritz Stern reminded us that the story of German-Jewish assimilation is also “an extraordinary success story” and “we must understand the triumphs in order to understand the tragedy.” Now Peter Gay attacks the notion that German Jews should be identified with modernism at all in German or Berlin culture. There is, he protests, no recognizably Jewish way of thinking and feeling.

There were German Jews in the avant-garde of high culture, but they were in the rear guard and in the center as well. Far fewer cultural revolutionaries and far more cultural reactionaries were Jews than historians have recognized. German Jews moved toward the mainstream of German culture as much as they were permitted to do so. There was nothing in the Jewish cultural heritage, and little in their particular social situation, that would make them into cultural rebels, into principled Modernists.

Gay is correct in his demonstration that German Jews were not synonymous with “modernism,” that in fact many of them were conservative, and others were banal and undistinguished. Aside from questions of representativeness and proportion, there is a major distortion in putting the question on where Jews stood on the aesthetic-cultural issues of modernism. He is answering the charges of German conservatives, anti-Semites of all patinas, and Nazis of the 1920s and '30s, that Jews were responsible for “modern” decadence in theater, art, journalism, that Jews were cultural radicals who dominated the intellectual life of Berlin and were the corrosive agents of urbanism, sexual promiscuity, mass merchandising, and sharp business practices. As Gay demonstrates by careful examination of these shibboleths, both Jews and non-Jews were cultural innovators, critics and defenders, impressionists and expressionists, conservatives, socialists, journalists, businessmen, and stodgy fools.

I accept the accuracy of Gay's formulation that most Jews were not modernists and most modernists were not Jewish. Most German Jews were solid *Bürgerlich* middle-class conservatives, good Germans, loyal nationalists, and they had conventional tastes. Certainly a majority of the Left and the literati were not Jews (viz: Brecht, the Mann brothers,

Hesse, von Ossietzky, etc.). Yet, when all this is said, there remains the problem of *proportion* of Jewish contribution to German and modernist culture *relative to their number* in the population (which in Germany was less than one percent), and, by contrast, their relatively large number among the Left, the intelligentsia, and the cultural leadership. To cite only an example from politics, Donald Niewyk estimates that roughly 10 percent of the leaders of the Social Democratic Party had Jewish backgrounds.

Beyond the issue of relative proportion of active agents in cultural innovation is the lack of awareness that the German-Jewish experience created a special cultural sensibility, a nuanced and delicate perceptiveness to matters of language and symbol of which Freud and Gay are but examples. As Ismar Schorsch points out, "We have hardly begun to explore the involved interaction between a disturbing but tolerable level of anti-Semitism and Jewish creativity in modern Germany." This is an exploration which Gay not only fails to undertake, but a premise which he obviously denies. To him there was no special Jewish creativity in the German cultural world before the Holocaust.

The case that Gay does not meet, and it is the relevant one, is that Jewish existence in the German Reich was fraught with an ever-present consciousness of differentness and what Fritz Stern in his study of Bismarck's banker, Gerson von Bleichröder, terms "perpetual vulnerability." "They lived," says Stern,

in a society that held them inferior, even contemptible. They did not escape the degradation of the downtrodden, the self-inflicted wound of assimilating the dominant group's judgment of oneself and one's kind. Their self-disdain reflected and reinforced their own sense of inferiority vis-à-vis the Germans. . . . Ambivalence was a large component of the psychic cost which German Jews had to pay for their extraordinary successes.

There was a cultural sensibility among German Jews that was honed and tempered in the daily grindstone of the awareness of being the exception, the exposed, the observed, the vilified, the actual or potential target of opprobrium, slander, and unfair attack, and the fervent desire to be accepted as equals by a culture they loved. This sense of separateness and position of cultural vulnerability was poignantly expressed by Ludwig Bjorne in 1832:

It is kind of a miracle! I have experienced it a thousand times, and yet it still seems new to me. Some find fault with me for being a Jew; others forgive me; still others go so far as to compliment me for it;

but every last one of them thinks of it. They seem caught in this magic circle of Jewishness; none of them can get out of it.

What is missed by Gay's strategy of argument is best seen in his treatment of the insights and career of the sociologist Georg Simmel, who was baptized as a Protestant at birth. Simmel nevertheless experienced the Jew's vulnerable position in German society. He was denied a professorship until he was fifty-six, and then it was at the boundary of the German Reich—at the University of Strasbourg. Simmel in 1908 defined the Jew in European society as the prototype of the "stranger"—who is not merely

the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as the person who comes today and stays tomorrow. He is, so to speak, the *potential* wanderer: although he has not moved on, he has not quite overcome the freedom of coming and going. He is fixed within a particular spatial group, or within a group whose boundaries are similar to spatial boundaries. But his position in this group is determined, essentially, by the fact that he has not belonged to it from the beginning, that he imports qualities into it, which do not and cannot stem from the group itself.

The stranger, Simmel said, "embodies that synthesis of nearness and distance which constitutes the formal position" of not being "radically committed to the unique ingredients and peculiar tendencies of the group, and [he] therefore approaches them with the specific attitude of objectivity! But objectivity does not simply involve passivity and detachment; it is a particular structure composed of distance and nearness, indifference and involvement."

Simmel's position reflected the jeopardy, risk, and sense of precarious insecurity he felt as a baptized Protestant who, when he was a candidate for a chair at Heidelberg, was successfully attacked in a letter to Baden's Minister of Culture as: "surely an Israelite through and through, in his outward appearance, in his bearing, and in his mental style."

Gay takes cognizance of these facts of Simmel's life and thought. Yet, he dismisses "The Stranger" as a "brief excursus in his largest, most comprehensive work" which, although "uncannily prescient" and "prophetic," is not essentially German-Jewish. Gay shows that Simmel was a cosmopolitan scholar influenced by, among others, Comte, Spencer, Kant, Hegel, and Marx. While conceding Simmel's personal identification with "The Stranger," Gay would obscure what

Simmel has to say about his own and the German-Jewish situation by reducing it to no more than any other of Simmel's commentaries on culture:

The few pages on the stranger in Simmel's *Soziologie* enjoy no special status; they are among dozens of brief and brilliant forays into such hitherto despised topics as adornment, conversation, secret societies, or gratitude. It is our generation that has lifted the excursus on the stranger from its larger context and imposed on it a factitious centrality.

Georg Simmel's sociology, Gay assures us, "was no more Jewish, no less German, than Max Weber's." But Weber did not deal with the exposed and vulnerable position of the stranger. It was not his life problem, as it was Simmel's. Why does Gay choose to deny the obvious personal relevance of Simmel's essay, as well as discount its importance as a contemporary analysis of the anomalous marginal Jewish position in German society?

Gay vigorously pursues the case that Freud was not, culturally speaking, a Viennese or Austrian at all. He places Freud squarely in the larger German culture of Northern Europe. Is there a sense in which Freud was specifically Austrian? What were the differences between German and Austrian culture? The culture of Germany is a culture with many centers and with a non-Jewish core. The culture of Vienna is the culture of Austria. Austria had no Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, or Kant. Viennese culture was an amalgam of Eastern European with German and Latin influences. The catalyst was the Jewish intelligentsia one or two generations removed from the eastern provinces of the Habsburg Empire. Freud's Jewish wit is not of German culture. It is influenced by the Yiddish culture of Leopoldstadt, the crowded Jewish quarter of Vienna where Freud's family lived after their arrival from Moravia. The triumph of "modernism" and the demographic accession of Eastern European Jewry to Vienna coincided. It is all a matter of two generations. With few exceptions all the early members of Freud's circle were Jews, and most had themselves been born in the Austrian provinces and emigrated to Vienna as children, as had Freud.

It is the element of a meeting of cultures in Vienna that constitutes the ambiance of Freud's creativity. While some interpreters of Freud have chosen to emphasize the analogy of his method to Jewish mystical interpretation and the *pilpul* of Torah explication, and Peter Gay stresses his affinity to the larger north German culture, both of these

views are distortions. Gay's lifting out the influence of mainstream German culture on Freud is not wrong, but it is one-sided. The mixture of Jewish background with German and classical Latin culture in Vienna, Freud's transmission of what he learned from Charcot, Janet, and Bernheim in France, created the amalgam of fertile mixing between cultures for which Freud and his generation of secularized Jews were the catalysts. The specific historical resistances to this blending, such as clerical reaction and Freud's reception by the Viennese medical and academic communities, are what made the unique seedbed that spawned and nurtured the psychoanalytic strand of modernist thought.

In his new work on Thorstein Veblen, John Diggins suggests that the Wisconsin-born son of Norwegian immigrant parents wrote "the closest thing to a self-portrait that Veblen ever committed to print" in a 1918 essay on "The Intellectual Pre-eminence of Jews in Modern Europe." Veblen noted "a fact which must strike any dispassionate observer—that the Jewish people have contributed much more than an even share to the intellectual life of modern Europe." The Norwegian American social critic hailed Jews as "the vanguard of modern inquiry," moved by a "skeptical animus, *Unbefangenheit* [and] released from the dead hand of conventional finality," who were the creators of new knowledge and productive insights. Said Veblen,

The intellectually gifted Jew is in a peculiarly fortunate position in respect of this requisite immunity from the inhibitions of intellectual quietism. But he can come in for such immunity only at the cost of losing his secure place in the scheme of conventions into which he has been born, and at the cost, also, of finding no similarly secure place in that scheme of gentile conventions into which he is thrown. For him as for other men in the like case, the skepticism that goes to make him an effectual factor in the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men involves a loss of that peace of mind that is the birthright of the safe and sane pietist. He becomes a disturber of the intellectual peace, but only at the cost of becoming an intellectual wayfaring man, a wanderer in the intellectual no-man's-land, seeking another place to rest, farther along the road, somewhere over the horizon. They are neither a complaisant nor a contented lot, these aliens of uneasy feet.

In 1958 Isaac Deutscher conceptualized the roots of this creativity as that of the "non-Jewish Jew"—who

dwelt on the borderlines of various civilizations, religions, and national cultures. They were born and brought up on the border-

lines of various epochs. Their mind matured where the most diverse cultural influences crossed and fertilized each other. They lived on the margins or in the nooks and crannies of their respective nations. Each of them was in society and yet not in it, of it and yet not of it. It was this that enabled them to rise in thought above their societies, above their nations, above their times and generations, and to strike out mentally into wide new horizons and far into the future.

These social commentators idealized the Jewish position in Western culture. The truth, however, is much more ambiguous, and this negative ambiguity of the Jew's vulnerable position on the boundary was expressed by Jews in the Wilhelmine era. In the Imperial Germany of 1912, well before the glorification of the Jewish position by Veblen and Deutscher, Moritz Goldstein published an essay, "German-Jewish Parnassus," in which he discussed Jewish prominence in the press, theater, music, and even the formal study of German literature which was now dominated by Jews in the seminars of German universities. He regretfully noted that Jewish contributions were resented and rejected with hostility. His conclusion was that Jews should cease engaging in apologetics and self-justification to the Germans. The indignant defensive position of seeking to be accepted would yield no results. His prescription was that Jews should proudly go their own way: "I don't know how other people feel, but, if I followed my instinct, I would go away. I would no longer endure being disliked, I would take what gifts I may possess somewhere, where people are prepared to use them—if only I knew where. We don't know of a way out. Perhaps we do, but we are not allowed to take it."

Goldstein's article stirred a stormy debate in the press. Among those who replied was my grandfather, who passionately defended the right of Jews to an equal place on the literary scene, with no second-class status. He asserted: "We are Germans, and want to remain German." Yet his poetry and stories are filled with the rage and frustration of a man who was deeply hurt in his life and interpersonal relations by anti-Semitism. When he was scheduled to speak at a meeting and another writer took his place because the racists protested, he said, "If our positions had been reversed, I would not have accepted."

What must it have felt like as a Jew to have one's status the subject of a great public debate in the 1870s and 1880s in which the German nationalist historian Heinrich von Treitschke, and the great historian of the Roman Republic, Theodor Mommsen, argued the role of the Jews in the German nation? Treitschke wrote ringing lines that would

be quoted and paraphrased by anti-Semites and by self-hating Jews like Walther Rathenau for the next six decades:

Year after year there pours over our Eastern frontier . . . from the inexhaustible Polish cradle, a host of ambitious, trouser-selling youths, whose children and children's children are one day to dominate Germany's stock exchanges and newspapers Right into the most educated circles, among men who would reject with disgust any thought of ecclesiastical intolerance or national pride, we can hear, as if from one mouth, "The Jews are our misfortune." *Ein Wort über unser Judentum*. (1880)

Mommsen challenged Treitschke in open letters and in a pamphlet, *Auch ein Wort über unser Judentum* (1880). But he was skeptical and full of despair about the prospects of answering the anti-Semites with rational arguments. Some years later he expressed his sense of futility to the writer Hermann Bahr with full appreciation of the psychological nature of the emotions they were trying to counter. He told Bahr:

You are mistaken, if you believe that I could achieve anything in this matter. You are mistaken if you assume that anything at all could be achieved by reason. In years past I thought so myself and kept protesting against the monstrous infamy that is anti-Semitism. But it is useless, completely useless. Whatever I or anybody else could tell you are in the last analysis reasons, logical and ethical arguments to which no anti-Semite will listen. They listen only to their own hatred and envy, to the meanest instincts. Nothing else counts for them. . . . There is no protection against the mob, be it the mob of the streets or of the parlors. *Canaille* remains *canaille*. It is a horrible epidemic, like cholera—one neither can explain nor cure it.

The essence of the crippling effect of persecution is that the victim internalizes in his own self-image and conduct the values of the persecutor. The sadist and the masochist form an exquisite dyad in which each identifies with parts of the other in executing the act of humiliation.

The twentieth-century analogue to the musical relationship of Hermann Levi and Richard Wagner was the collaboration between Stefan Zweig and Richard Strauss. In 1931 Strauss was desperately looking for a librettist to replace Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who had died in 1929. Strauss, who was sixty-seven, felt his ability to continue to compose depended on collaboration with an author who could inspire him. He knew that he no longer had the creative freshness required for

a symphonic work; only a drama could stimulate in him musical themes to match the situations and words. In Stefan Zweig he found just what he needed—a musically sensitive author who could deliver a libretto Strauss did not have to alter. In their correspondence we see the first shy approaches of the Viennese Jewish writer who lived in Salzburg, to the world's leading composer who lived nearby, just over the German border, in Garmisch.

The product of their collaboration was *Die schweigsame Frau*, based on Ben Jonson's early seventeenth-century comedy, *Epicoene*, or *The Silent Woman*. The background of the collaboration was the political upheaval of nazism that would intrude upon their lives and work. Following Hitler's *Machtergreifung* in January 1933 any performance on which a Jewish author had collaborated became illegal. These two artists, despite their nonpolitical intentions, were forced to deal with politics. Strauss became President of the Reich's Music Chamber "because the goodwill of the new German government in promoting music and theater can really produce a lot of good." He further unhesitatingly took the place of Bruno Walter in Berlin "for the orchestra's sake," and the place of Arturo Toscanini "for the sake of Bayreuth" when in 1933 they were not permitted to conduct in Germany. In February 1934, on a visit to Vienna, Zweig reported that "an artillery barrage blared into the beautiful days." The reference was to the Schutzbund rising of the Austrian Social Democrats against the Dollfuss clerico-fascist regime. Zweig was shadowed by German agents when he visited London, and Strauss reported this to him, complimenting him on his "magnificent conduct."

As the political and racial criteria of nazism closed in ever tighter on the writer and composer, Zweig maintained silence for the sake of work. In Strauss we see the hubris of the artist who thinks he is above politics and who believes he can "fix" everything on the highest level. Strauss intercedes with the *Völkischer Beobachter* to correct a defamation of Zweig. He takes up the case with Propaganda Minister Goebbels and eventually meets with Hitler to gain personal approval for the performance of *The Silent Woman*. The opera was scheduled for its world premiere in 1935 in the famous Saxon State Opera in Dresden, where Strauss' other operas had also opened. There was a final struggle with the opera management over whether Zweig's name would be printed on the program. Strauss threatened to leave if his librettist's name was suppressed, and he got his way. The opera was closed in Germany after three performances, to be revived after the war.

At the inception of their relationship, Zweig was courting Strauss;

sexual experience with a woman who visits him. For most of the poem the hero is a kind of poetic crab, crawling around the night sky and being crawled over by the constellation-beasts inside his sick, drunk head. He is trying to use his poetry to find a personal pattern in the existing pattern above him, trying to put himself in the poem of the universe as a new line making a new poem.

The subject, then, is the transforming imagination desperately trying to be itself transformed. This is a Faustian theme, but unlike Faust the hero of Dickey's poem doesn't know the formulas of incantation that will put him in touch with whatever is out there. He must live through the limbo-misery of trying to invent them, trying to become at least the Faust of act one before he dies.

In *The Zodiac* Dickey is concerned, for a change, with how to relate the self to the pattern of things in some other way than by dying or evaporating into it. In Dickey's previous work, especially the ambitious *Falling* and *Mayday Sermon*, one saved oneself by consuming oneself. One had to burn up one's precious ration of corporeality to transcend the powers of custom and of self that had subjugated that corporeality—one destroyed it to liberate it. Visionary, over-heated, D.H. Lawrence whirled one more flight up the stairs toward hysteria. Is there a cooler way, *The Zodiac* seems to ask in dialectic with Dickey's past work. If we add the mind to the body this time, connect them

with the poem

That links up my balls and the strange, silent words

can we cool things down to thinkable temperatures?

The poem is a mixture, strange for Dickey, of the heightened—bravado and despair—and the humble—plain conversation.

Even drunk

Even in the white, whiskey-struck, splintered star of a bottle-room
dancing

He knows he's not fooling himself he knows

Not a damn thing of stars of God of space

Of time love night death sex fire numbers signs words,

Not much of poetry. But by God, we've got a *universe*

Here

Those designs of time are saying *something*
Or maybe something or *other*.

The obsessions are cooled, and the head that produces such obsessions is seen by Dickey as an object of interest, of poetry, in its own right.

You and the paper should have known it, you and the ink: you write

Everybody writes

With blackness. Night. Why has it taken you all this time?

All this travel, all those lives

You've fucked up? All those books read

Not deep enough? It's staring you right in the face. The

secret—

Is whiteness. You can do *anything* with that. But no—

The secret is that on whiteness you can release

The blackness,

The night sky. Whiteness is death is
dying

For human words to raise it from purity from the grave

Of too much light.

At last the visions in Dickey's poetry are getting a home, a source: someone is inventing them, someone with a consciousness not identical to the images it concocts.

But the attempt, it seems to me, is not successful. Much of the reflective casualness is strained and feeble. The poet emerges as a speaker in various voices that are all fundamentally impersonal. His past, what he cannot any longer be, ought to be imagined much more fully if it is brought up at all, in order for us to marvel at what he is now. And the attempts to link his dying with the destruction of Europe in the war only draw attention to the essential weightlessness in the poem of the man and his predicament. A created consciousness is trying to find a place in Dickey's created world, but it is as yet a shadow, unable to inform the work, unable to engage us.

It is no surprise then that the poem's bravado is more successful than its despair, or, perhaps more accurately, than its attempt to evoke a power of desperation which is too vital a quality to become actual despair. The bravado is easier to manage, and it produces better poetry. The lines that invent a new constellation are wonderful:

My head is smashed with *aquavit*,

And I've got a damn good Lobster in it for for

The Zodiac. I'll send it right up.

And listen now

I want *big* stars: some red some white some blue-white dwarves—

I want *everybody* to see my lobster! This'll be a *healing* lobster:
 Not Cancer. People will pray to him. He'll have a good effect
 On time.

Now what I want to do is stretch him out

Jesus Christ, I'm drunk
 I said stretch stretch
 Him out is what I said stretch him out for millions

Of light years. His eye his eye

I'll make blue-white, so that the thing
 Will cut and go deep and heal. God, the *claws* that son-of-a-bitch

Is going to get from You! The clock-spire is telling me
 To lie
 for glory. This is a poet talking to You
 Like you talked to yourself, when you made all this up while you conceived

The Zodiac. From every tower in Europe:
 From my lifework and stupid travels and loneliness
 And drunkenness, I'm changing the heavens
 In my head. Get up there, baby, and dance on your claws:
 On the claws God's going to give you.

By contrast, the desperation is literary, a cultivated mode with little emotional resonance. Its self-deflating tone possibly issues from an embarrassment Dickey may feel at some of his own grandiosity:

Son of a bitch.
 His life is shot my life is shot.
 It's also shit. He knows it. Where's it all gone off to?

Literariness is a surprisingly prevalent flaw in the poem. Too many of the poem's shaping images are really only conceits, too brittle and "witty" to lend much supportive strength. The elaborate game of white-paper-light-ink-night-black that appeared in one of the quotations above does not exhaust the poem's cleverness with color, and after I finished reading the section which reveals that the crab is Cancer which eats like time does—time is cancer, time is crab, crabs eat—I wondered whether the poem wasn't getting just a little self-infatuated. I suppose that a poem with metaphysical concerns is permitted some metaphysical conceits, is licensed to track down some of fate's more ingenious and confidential equations, but Dickey permits himself too much problem-solving and point-scoring.

Dickey's broken, staggered lines are characteristic of his later poems and represent at their best an attempt at purification of expression. Each phrase is now alone with the poet's voice, and freed, as much as possible, from any discursive obligation that is alien to that voice. The reader is now alone with the poet's power; there is no convention of typewriter-return to regularize and deaden response.

What Dickey does with his white spaces is create the medium through which his poem moves: the air, ether, or amniotic fluid that sustains the poetic vision at the same time that it draws attention to its fragility. In *Mayday Sermon* the spaces are pauses for visionary strength in the mad oratory. In *Falling* the spaces become air, the medium of the fall—the very page is, so to speak, unresisting, frictionless, indifferent to the force which is going to kill the person whose life is moving on it. In *The Zodiac* the printed page refutes the whole idea of a receivable order. The blank page becomes something that can only intermittently be charged with meaning.

At one point the poet-hero turns to sex for his own meaning, and it is one of the most compressed and most evocative sections in the poem. Dickey catches the misery of knowing there are patterns and knowing one does not belong, trying, and being worn away each night when the patterns come out.

Twilight passes, then night.

Their bodies are found by the dawn, their souls
 Fallen from them, left in the night
 Of patterns the night that's just finished
 Overwhelming the earth.

Fading fading faded . . .

They lie like the expanding universe.

Too much light. Too much love.

Here, the "witty" associations of imagery tumble into full sentience and create an unarguable moment of feeling, strange but right. We're inside the poet-hero's ache at the chaos of experience and at the changeless forms that preside over the chaos, that alone can give it meaning, and that work on him most terribly when he tries to replace them with something living—making him feel only the loss of their presence, scattering his sense of self, sealing his loneliness.

IRA HAUPTMAN

ABRAHAM CAHAN, THE FATHER OF THE WORLD OF OUR FATHERS

FROM THE GHETTO: THE FICTION OF ABRAHAM CAHAN. By Jules Chametzky. University of Massachusetts Press. \$10.00.

Philip Rahv once argued against the customary notion that American-Jewish writers comprised “some kind of literary faction or school” and deplored the resulting homogenization of diverse styles, sensibilities and cultural manifestations. Henry Roth and Mike Gold, Bernard Malamud and Philip Roth, Saul Bellow and Isaac Bashevis Singer cannot be easily thought of as sharing a common literary stance based on “Jewishness”—which is, according to Rahv, an elusive quality and rather difficult to define. Curiously, however, the achievement of one single writer—whose works are half-forgotten and whose occasional stylistic weaknesses have prompted apologetic remarks by more than one critic—does illuminate and, perhaps, constitute the common ground upon which Jewish-American fiction has developed. The monumental figure who is so central to Jewish writing in America is Abraham Cahan (1860-1951); and Jules Chametzky’s *From the Ghetto* is the first book-length study of Cahan’s literary works in Yiddish and English.

Chametzky’s excellent, fascinating and fully researched study traces Cahan’s literary career from his Russian-Jewish background to his longtime editorial work at the *Jewish Daily Forward*, and focuses on the period from 1882 (the year in which Cahan came to America) to 1917 (when his most famous novel, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, appeared in print). A youthful radical at the Vilna Teachers’ Institute, Cahan broke with traditional Judaism and became converted to socialism in the Old World. In America, the land in which “a shister (shoemaker) became a mister,” Cahan soon developed his skills as a socialist journalist who proposed that Jewish workers should be addressed in Yiddish, whereas the “Propaganda Society for the Dissemination of Socialist Ideas among Immigrant Jews” (of which Cahan was a member) somewhat arrogantly favored Russian and regarded Cahan’s proposal as “faintly comic.” Cahan’s Yiddish journalism, from the founding of the short-lived *Di Neie Tseit* to his socialist version of a “Dear Abby” column in the *Forward* (“A Bintel Brief”), reflected his messianic longing to reach and lead the immigrant

masses. At the same time, Cahan saw his role as that of a mediator between cultures; as Chametzky points out, Cahan wrote both a polemical article in *The New York World* about the coronation of Czar Alexander III as well as a campaign report on the making of the American president in 1884 for a leading literary journal in Petersburg. To the circle around Lincoln Steffens and Hutchins Hapgood of the *Commercial Advertiser*, Cahan represented “the spirit of the East Side” ghetto. And he translated Marx, Darwin, and Herbert Spencer, as well as Tolstoy, Hugo, Howells, and Hardy, into Yiddish. As Chametzky says, “Cahan’s was a complex sensibility, that of an intellectual and writer nurtured by Russian and American culture as well as a Jewish life.” His cultural versatility made Cahan acutely sensitive to the tensions experienced by the participants of the New Immigration as well as to the political problems of the Old World and the New. By transcending the boundaries of one single culture he could become the representative man “to stand for East European Jews in America” (Nathan Glazer), the father of the world Irving Howe portrayed.

Chametzky’s *From the Ghetto* provides us with a valuable systematic survey and subtle interpretations of Cahan’s literary oeuvre against the background of cultural conflict. Chametzky shows how Cahan’s sense of tension and self-division—he planned, but never finished, a major novel entitled *The Chasm*—entered and shaped his fiction, so that Cahan’s creative responses to these tensions became a significant contribution to American realism as well as a pioneering achievement in Jewish-American writing. Cahan’s short stories told the immigrants about America and America about the immigrants; they attracted William Dean Howells’s attention, and their formal achievements were echoed by writers from Gold to Roth. Chametzky’s comparisons between Cahan’s Yiddish and English stories, and in two instances between differing Yiddish and English versions of the same story, are fascinating as they seem to provide a model approach to the study of cultural dualism: “In matters of social theory and sex (Cahan) seems less restrained with his Jewish” than his American audience; yet, his Yiddish writing is also more heavily didactic and tendentious than his English work. When Cahan reworked the draft of a long story, “Fanny and Her Suitors,” into Yiddish, he introduced a socialist editor whose long speeches present the socialist line on love, marriage, and the family. In his English fiction, he developed the persona of a superior narrator “explaining to a reader, whose values he presumably shares, some inside information about the Jewish immigrant culture in America,” a narrative mode which has become dominant in much

ethnic literature. *From the Ghetto* draws us into Cahan's multicultural world and explores his literary choices fully.

Interestingly, Cahan's English stories render their immigrant protagonists' English crudely, interspersed with neologisms, such as "oyshgreen" (out-green) or "allrightnik," which float between cultures as their speakers do; yet the characters' Yiddish is translated into a more subtle English, indicative of a wider range of perception and emotion. As Chametzky points out, Cahan's choice of a two-tier English was adapted and fully developed in Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*. In "A Providential Match" immigrant Rouvke Arbel changes his name to "Friedman," and like the protagonist of Bernard Malamud's "Lady of the Lake" he is only superficially a "freed" man. In another Cahan story, Rafael Naarizokh discovers that socialism is his "song of songs," reminding us of the ending of Mike Gold's *Jews Without Money*. In Cahan's work, which was praised by Saul Bellow and Isaac Rosenfeld, we can observe the germination of what was to become Jewish-American fiction.

Cahan published three novels in English, and Chametzky discusses them in the context of realism, of which Cahan was a lifelong advocate. *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896), recently popularized by Joan Micklin Silver's movie *Hester Street*, was highly praised by Howells, who reviewed the book alongside Stephen Crane's *George's Mother*. *The White Terror and the Red* (1905) was Cahan's ambitious but unsuccessful attempt to write a popular novel of conspiratory politics, which interestingly dealt with the question of anti-Semitism among Russian revolutionaries of the 1870s and 1880s. Cahan's reputation as a realistic novelist rests on *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), which Chametzky interprets, in his final chapter, in the context of *The Rise of Silas Lapham* and *Sister Carrie*, and evaluates as a peer of these books. By merging the themes of cultural dualism with the plot of success as failure, Cahan managed to create a complex character in David Levinsky who is a "great egoist" and an unreliable narrator, frustrated lover and "sad millionaire."

Chametzky carefully and subtly interprets the literary voice of a man who experienced "the chasm" that has remained a formal and thematic reference point in the fiction of the second and third generations. Seen through Cahan's works, there are unifying elements in American-Jewish literature; and they include, from the very beginning, "Jewishness" and "Americanness."

WERNER SOLLORS

THE EDUCATION OF DAVID KEPESH

THE PROFESSOR OF DESIRE. By Philip Roth. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. \$8.95.

The Professor of Desire is a surprisingly good novel. Surprising, because after the sharply etched satirical stories of *Good-bye, Columbus*, Philip Roth has shown himself in novel after novel to be a writer trapped in the limitations of his real but narrow virtues. Possessing an unusual gift for social mimicry as well as for zanily fantastic extrapolations from familiar social behavior, he has repeatedly ended up with a proliferation of tics and negative stereotypes instead of psychologically interesting characters and actions. One can guess that there is a good deal of uncontrolled rage working through the novels—in particular, toward two categories of people, women and Jewish parents—and however much he may seem at first to be treating his personages with an attempt at balance and fullness (as in the promising first part of *My Life as a Man*), he is finally unable to restrain what reads like a spiteful assault on the resented characters in which he smears them—sometimes quite literally—with their own filth.

The first fifty pages of *The Professor of Desire* look very much like Roth's earlier fiction. The narrator, David Kepesh, is another of those neurotic Jewish intellectuals, vaguely contemptuous of himself, hopelessly fixated on the squirming sexual discomforts of his own precocious but also seemingly permanent adolescence as he flounders into his thirties. (Roth has said in an interview that this Kepesh is not to be thought of as the same character who is the hero of *The Breast*—surely his most lamentable lapse—but why the two should then have the same name remains a mystery.) Kepesh's parents run a small kosher hotel in the Catskills, and he attempts to break loose from their restrictive world of smothering solicitude and nagging exhortations by the simultaneous pursuit of literary studies and female pudenda (preferably Gentile).

The most extended episode of this first section has the disquietingly familiar Roth look of a fantasy of wish fulfillment substituted for novelistic invention. Kepesh, during a Fulbright year in England, falls into a *ménage à trois* with two extravagantly cooperative Swedish girls, Elisabeth and Birgitta. Elisabeth, it turns out, actually loves him and

does great violence to her own nature in order to satisfy the combinatory convolutions of his sexual whims. Birgitta, on the other hand, is a real sexual rogue, eager to explore every avenue of *outrance* and debasement with or for Kepesh. "Yes, there is Elisabeth's unfathomable and wonderful love and there is Birgitta's unfathomable and wonderful daring, *and whichever I want I can have*. Now isn't *that* unfathomable! Either the furnace or the hearth!"

At first this sounds like too many erotic goodies to be true, but what I think emerges as the novel develops is that the very schematism of the female pair is quite deliberate, and helps make a point. For even more than Roth's earlier fiction, this is a self-consciously "Freudian" novel, and the psychodynamics of desire are meant to be defined through the symmetry of an avowed schema—furnace and hearth, the woman who becomes the polymorphous accomplice of the dangerous id, and the woman linked with refuge and order, with eros assimilated to the demands of the superego.

The polarities of Elisabeth and Birgitta are then reproduced on a higher level, with a psychological persuasiveness new for Roth, in the two women with whom Kepesh is involved (this time, serially) for the rest of the novel. If Birgitta, as the associations of her name suggest, is a simple, provocative sex kitten, Helen, whom Kepesh marries in graduate school, is a glamorous romantic adventuress—she has lived in the Far East as the mistress of an immensely powerful, rather sinister man—and she is presented without apology as The Most Beautiful Woman Kepesh has ever seen, Helen of Troy being duly invoked. The marriage, of course, is hopeless from the start, Helen, with her hour-long baths and facial saunas and high-priced cosmetics and dazzling wardrobe, incapable of understanding Kepesh's need for order in daily life and for serious intellectual work. Roth renders the slow, rasping breakdown of the marriage with a wonderful ear for the petty, deadly abrasiveness of conjugal dialogue, and at the same time he manages to give Helen her due, firmly perceiving that Kepesh is as impossible for her as she is for Kepesh.

After the divorce, Kepesh, now an assistant professor of comparative literature living in New York, is rescued from depression and impotence by Claire, with whom he is still sharing an idyll of domestic bliss and erotic solace at the end of the novel, an idyll he is sure will soon crumble. *Her* name, of course, suggests "light," and she is obviously a sublimer Elisabeth, truly devoted to Kepesh, frank, optimistic, sexually tender though decidedly unexperimental, and with a rare gift for creating lucid order around her. She gives him everything he needs to pull his devastated life together again, but she is finally too

much hearth for this man haunted by the perilous intensities of the erotic furnace, and he gloomily imagines his desire for her gradually dying into cold ash.

Despite the title, and despite all I have said, the book is not merely a study of the problematics of desire. It is rather a novel about the painful attempt to grow up (earlier Roth protagonists don't try so manfully), to confront one's own nature, to make some kind of coherence in one's life against the terrible centrifugal pull of an adult awareness of human mortality. The narrative that begins with erotic sensations eventually touches unexpectedly deep feelings. Roth handles the wrench caused by the death of Kepesh's mother with artistic tact and with just the right note of sad comedy, and those same qualities are observable in his treatment of Kepesh's father in the last scene of the novel. The old man is blustering, overbearing, moralistic, obtuse, a grotesque captive of his lifelong personal and ethnic reflexes, and yet he dearly loves his son, and the son, though discomfited and fatigued by his father, recognizes this, trembles at the thought of the father's possibly imminent demise.

The repeated allusions to the literary texts with which Kepesh is professionally concerned eventually help focus this larger perspective of implication for the novel, which at first seemed circumscribed by the special case of one character's neuroses. Roth, I would suggest, is less essentially a "Jewish" novelist than a perfect novelist for the new mass audience of university-educated people touched in varying degrees by intellectuality—from the readers of *The New York Review of Books* (of the reviews in the front as well as of the personal ads in the back) to the audiences for whom Woody Allen intends the easy intellectual allusions in his films. The literary tradition Roth invokes is pretty much limited to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and is exclusively composed of works and authors that get onto the reading lists of standard Great Books courses: Flaubert, Gogol, Chekhov, Tolstoi, Hawthorne, Melville, James, Kafka. What is important is that here he makes this selective tradition work as a means of defining the world of his novel. Ingeniously, at one point he smuggles into the narrative exactly the generalization about the human condition he wants to emerge from his protagonist's experience by quoting from an undergraduate paper submitted to Kepesh on "Anton Chekhov's overall philosophy of life": "We are born innocent, we suffer terrible disillusionment before we gain knowledge, and then we fear death—and we are granted only fragmentary happiness to offset the pain."

The concluding pages of the novel are a beautifully dramatized

image of this sense of life. The self-conscious Professor Kepesh actually summarizes the scene in which he finds himself by describing it as a Chekhov story. Then, appropriately, he reverses field and wonders whether, because he is such a grotesque and not one of Chekhov's quietly unspectacular sufferers, Gogol might be a more apposite model. Nevertheless, this final episode has a muted meditative quality, a plangency, which succeed in being vaguely Chekhovian. At the very end, Kepesh is chilled by the knowledge that he himself and those to whom he is bound in affection are as vulnerably mortal as the flowering of desire with which he has been obsessed since puberty.

In the guest room of his rented summer house, his father sleeps alongside a crony, Mr. Barbatnik—who, at Kepesh's insistence, has just told his story of survival in a concentration camp. Kepesh wakes from a swarm of bad dreams to cling to Claire's welcoming body. But even in the mounting rhythm of their physical passion, he is daunted by the awful fragility of everything he seems to possess: "Even as I pit all my accumulated happiness, and all my hope, against my fear of transformations yet to come, I wait to hear the most dreadful sound imaginable emerge from the room where Mr. Barbatnik and my father lie alone and insensate, each in his freshly made bed." That final phrase, so right as an understated image of tenuous comfort and refuge, might be a deliberate echo of "each in its ordered place," the gesture of illusory harmony in a world of radical disorder with which *The Sound and The Fury* concludes. But this moment has its own poignancy, which is a new note for Roth. It offers hope that, after nearly twenty years in the wilderness of Borscht Circuit routines and sexual psychodramas, this talented writer may be coming of age.

ROBERT ALTER

FASHIONABLE DESPAIR

PLAYERS. By Don DeLillo. Knopf. \$7.95.

Is it possible to sustain a whole novel about depression? *Nausea* is the great work on that unpromising subject, and the narrator of Beckett's trilogy remains unflaggingly morose through several hundred pages; but far more books induce depression than evoke it. Don DeLillo's novels manage to do both. His interpretation of the prevailing contemporary mood concentrates on nihilism stripped of any Dostoevskian *brío*, and his characters are usually young New York "professionals"—the same people who read the "Home" and "Family Style" sections of *The New York Times* (a more contented lot, to my mind, than DeLillo would admit). DeLillo's novels purport to be a somber chronicle of decadence and desperation in the modern world; they are "heavy," to borrow the parlance of his characters. But the despair in his novels is fashionable despair, and the people depicted in them could have been drawn by William Hamilton, the New Yorker cartoonist whose only subjects are humorless, affluent, sophisticated Easterners—only there is not a trace of irony in DeLillo's work, five ponderous novels that have been overpraised.

Exhibit A:

There was a vein of murder snaking across the continent beneath highways, smoke-stacks, oilrigs and gasworks, a casual savagery fed by the mute cities, by fluid drained from the numb hollow eyes of all the hospitals, and I wondered what impossible distance must be travelled to get from there to here, what language crossed, how many levels of being. The city eats itself, its own broken bones, until nothing remains but the unbearable breath of disease.

I submit that this passage, from *Americana*, DeLillo's first novel, is bathetic, strident, orotund: in short, bad prose. But there is worse: "My feet were still up on the chair. There was an outside chance that if I stayed in that position long enough I might find wisdom; that ability to perceive dispassionately the eventual horror of all human conduct." This labored epiphany, like an earlier reference to cocktail parties as "the essence of Western civilization," exemplifies what Sartre called "bad faith": obsessed with nothingness, a void that threatens to rob life

of significance, DeLillo dilutes the anguish of his characters by depriving them of will.

And his prose reflects this poverty of motive. Numb and lifeless, laden with abstract formulations, it is the prose of an intelligent writer who lacks any talent for feeling. DeLillo can only explore emotions with a remorseless rhetoric that he mistakes for precision, as if *le mot juste* were a mathematical formula. Here I must introduce Exhibit B, a description of sex from his latest novel:

This left and right. Leg, index finger, testicle and breast. This crossing over. The recomposition of random parts into something self-made. For a time it seemed the essential factors were placement, weight and balance. The meaning of left and right. The transpositions.

This sort of elaborate, fastidious diction appears to mean more than it does, and deserves banishment to Pseuds' Corner, that venerable showcase of ostentatious prose in *Private Eye*, the British humor journal.

What are DeLillo's novels about? I have procrastinated over this question because their subject, it should be evident by now, is *Angst*, *angoisse*, anomie. David Bell, the narrator of *Americana*, is a "child of Godard and Coca-Cola"—an appropriate reference, since the imagery of DeLillo's novels resembles nothing more than Godard's films. Disillusioned with his work as a television producer in New York, Bell embarks on the obligatory drive across America, an excuse for trotting out those convenient emblems of America's fabled impersonality: motels—"There is a motel in the heart of every man," he claims—anonymous sex, aimless conversation in bars. But to hasten ahead: *Great Jones Street*, DeLillo's second novel, concerned a decadent rock 'n roll star; *End Zone* was about football, and culminated in a theoretical peroration on the game that would have perplexed both Roland Barthes and Howard Cosell; and I simply could not finish *Ratner's Star*. Disheartened by the blurb, which informed me that the plot revolved around a fourteen-year-old mathematical genius and Nobel Laureate whose favorite axiom is "Keep believing it, shit-for-brains," I waded gamely through a few complicated treatises on physics, and began to wonder if DeLillo had missed his vocation; his books are crammed with recondite lore—*End Game* features a discourse on military strategies in the event of nuclear war—but are they novels? Perhaps he should have been a phenomenologist.

Players represents an improvement over his earlier books. There are fewer longwinded soliloquys, more believable characters, and at least the semblance of a story. Like Conrad's *The Secret Agent* and Paul Theroux's *The Family Arsenal*, its subject is terrorism. Lyle and Pammy Wynant, a bored young New York couple, suffer the vague depression that is a requirement of DeLillo's characters. Watching television in their East Side apartment, drinking in cocktail lounges after work, talking aimlessly on the phone, the Wynants exhibit the sort of despair common to New Yorkers; their experience could be defined by that word appropriated from psychoanalysis and now made to serve as a description of the contemporary urban sensibility: the Wynants are paranoid. Lyle contemplates the human detritus aswarm in the streets, and thinks of them as "infiltrators": "Elements filtering in. Nameless arrays of existence." Pammy works at the World Trade Center, and worries about the elevators. Everyone converses in the same primitive, inarticulate speech—"What's these?" "Brandy snaps." "Triffic"—or resorts to banal sarcasm: "What'd you get me for Valentine's Day?" Pammy asks, and Lyle replies, "A vasectomy." To remedy their condition of monotonous dread, Pammy goes off to Maine with a homosexual couple, and Lyle becomes involved in a plot to bomb the New York Stock Exchange, where he works as a broker.

Players is an accurate portrait of certain New York types: unhappy business executives, listless secretaries, revolutionaries without politics. "The sensual pleasure of banality was a subject worth the deepest investigation," DeLillo writes. It was for Flaubert, but DeLillo never quite manages to escape the solemn, portentous abstractions that marred his earlier novels. There is a great deal of wooden speculation and labored symbolism in *Players*—as in the following semiological excursus:

She walked beneath a flophouse marquee. It read: TRAN-SIENTS. Something about that word confused her. It took on an abstract tone, as words had done before in her experience (although rarely), subsisting in her mind as language units that had mysteriously evaded the responsibilities of content. Tran-zhents. What it conveyed could not itself be put into words. The functional value had slipped out of its bark somehow and vanished. Pammy stopped walking, turned her body completely and looked once more at the sign. Seconds passed before she grasped its meaning.

The characters in *Players* are given to wondering if they are "too complex," but it occurs to me that perhaps they are too simple, too

remote from the commonplace emotions of jealousy, love, self-consciousness, disappointment, pleasure and guilt to be interesting. No doubt DeLillo's purpose is to demonstrate that our brutal capitalist society has denied us even the memory of these emotions. The trouble is that his rude, unpleasant characters are *too* convincing; possessing none of the qualities that imbue life with dramatic significance or moral value, they leave the reader indifferent to their fate. DeLillo's novels reminded me of an admonitory letter Henry James wrote to the French novelist Paul Bourget about his work: "In a word, all this is far from being life as I feel it, as I see it, as I know it, as I wish to know it."

JAMES ATLAS

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